

MY NAME IS _____

MY CLASS IS _____

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CHINA CALLING - LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE



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Picture - *Hua Mulan* - Silk painting - Dwight Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives and Records Administration, <http://hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/china/ancientciv/philosophy>.

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FABLES AND TALES



Chinese porcelain girl – The Devoted Classicist

YEH-SHEN, A Cinderella Story

In a community of cave-dwellers called Wudoung, their chief by the name of Wu had two wives and a daughter by each of them. Yeh-Shen was Wu's daughter of one wife, and she was extremely beautiful and kind, and gifted in many skills like pottery and poetry. In contrast, her half-sister Jun-li was plain-looking, selfish and lazy, and both she and her mother, Wu's other wife, envied the attention Wu lavished upon Yeh-Shen. Yeh-Shen's mother died while she was still a baby, so Wu did all he could to raise his motherless daughter.

Unfortunately, Yeh-Shen's father dies from a local plague, and a new chieftain was appointed to take his place, as Wu had no sons. With her family reduced to poverty, Yeh-Shen was forced to become a lowly servant and work for her scheming stepmother and envious older sister. Despite living a life burdened with chores and housework, and suffering endless abuse at her stepmother's hands, she finds solace when she ends up befriending a beautiful, 10-foot-long (3.0 m) fish in the lake near her home, with golden eyes and scales. The fish was really a guardian spirit sent to her by her own mother, who never forgot her daughter even beyond the grave.

One day, Jun-li follows Yeh-Shen to the lake, and discovers her talking to the fish. Angry that Yeh-Shen has found happiness, she told her mother everything that she had seen. The cruel woman tricked Yeh-Shen into giving her the tattered dress she wears, and by this, catches and kills the fish and serves it for dinner for herself and Jun-li. Yeh-Shen is devastated until the spirit of an old man, possibly one of her ancestors, in a white robe with a white hair, appears and tells her to bury the bones of the fish in four pots and hide each pot at the corners under her bed. The spirit also tells her that whatever she needs will be granted if she talks to the bones.

Once in a year, the New Year Festival was celebrated. This was also the time for the young maidens to meet potential husbands. Not wishing to spoil her own daughter's chances, the stepmother forces her stepdaughter to remain home and clean their cave-house. After her step-family has left for the festival, Yeh-Shen is visited by the fish's spirit again. She makes a silent wish to the bones and Yeh-Shen finds herself clothed magnificently, in a gown of sea-green silk, a cloak of kingfisher bird feathers and a pair of golden slippers.

Yeh-Shen went to the festival by foot. She is admired by everyone, in particular the young men who believed her to be a princess, and enjoys herself until she realizes that Jun-Li may have recognized her and leaves, accidentally leaving behind a golden slipper. When she arrives home, she hides her finery and the remaining slipper under her bed. The fish bones were silent now, however, for it warned Yeh-Shen before not to lose even one of her slippers. Sadly, she falls asleep under a tree. Her step family return from the festival and mention a mysterious beauty who appeared at the festival, but are unaware that it was Yeh-Shen they are speaking of.

The golden slipper is found by a local peasant who trades it, and it is passed on to various people until it reaches the hands of the nearby king of the To'Han islets, a powerful kingdom covering thousands of small

islands. Fascinated by the shoe's small size, he issues a search to find the maiden whose foot will fit into the shoe and proclaims he will marry that girl. The search extends until it reaches the community of the cave-dwellers, and everyone, including Jun-Li, the late chief Wu's firstborn, tried the slipper. But by some magic, it seemed to shrink its size whenever touching a maiden's foot. Despondent that he could not find the woman he was searching for; the king made a great pavilion and placed the shoe there on display. Yeh-Shen arrives there late in the evening to retrieve the slipper, but was mistaken as a thief. Yeh-Shen then was brought before the king, and there she told him everything about her life, how she lost her friend, the gold-eyed fish, and now her slipper. The king, struck by her gentle nature and beauty even though she lived in the land of the savages, believed her and allowed her to go home with the slipper.

The next morning, the king goes into Yeh-Shen's house and asks her to come with him into his kingdom. Yeh-Shen then wears both her shoes, and appears in her beautiful sea-green gown. The stepmother and Jun-li, however, said that Yeh-Shen could not have those kind of clothes, for she was only their slave, and the stepmother said that the finery was Jun-li's and Yeh-Shen stole them. The king dismisses her lies, and invites Yeh-Shen to live at the palace with him as his wife and queen. She accepts, but her cruel step-family was left with their fate, which is to be banished to the wilderness by the king forever. On the other hand the king takes Yeh-Shen into his kingdom and makes her his queen.

The story of Yeh-Shen was first told as Ye-Xian in the book, *Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*. In Chapter 21, the author Duan Chengshi first transcribed the legend (9th Century.) Also, Library of Congress, Folklore and Legends, www.loc.gov/rr/asian division

1. Do you think this could have happened? _____
2. Who do you think the fish was? _____
3. What happened to Yeh-Shen's parents? _____
4. Does the story have a happy ending? _____





Ancient silk painting thought to be of Mulan

The Story of Mulan

In Han times, or perhaps Sui times, but certainly before T'ang times, there lived a young girl named Mulan. She was the daughter of a general. Although these were not skills girls normally learned, her father had taught her to use a sword and ride a horse.

Life was very good in the village, until one day, warriors came. They posted scrolls with a list of names. Faced with the threat of war, each family in the village had to send one man to strengthen the army. In Mulan's family, the man chosen to go was her father. The warriors were there to take the men listed away to fight.

Mulan's father was a retired general. He was too old to fight, but too honorable not to go. Mulan had no older brother to send in his place. Her younger brother was a wonderful boy, brave and strong, but

he was much too young to be selected.

If only she were a boy, Mulan thought to herself, it would be so simple. But girls did not fight in wars. Oh why oh why had she not been born a boy, Mulan thought angrily to herself.

An idea grew in Mulan's mind. Could she do it? She had to. Mulan knew her father would die if he went to war again. That day, she bought a horse.

The next morning, Mulan stole her father's armor and crept silently from home, disguised as a man. She reported for duty to the military leader. The leader had never met her father. Besides, he had his hands full, marching the men from all the villages to the camp.

Mulan fought for many years, some say as many as ten years. In all that time, no one knew she was not a man. When the war ended, Mulan was called before the emperor to receive a special award for her incredible courage. The emperor offered Mulan a job that would make her rich beyond her dreams. But Mulan wished to return home to her family. She asked for a good horse instead which was immediately granted.

Her family was so happy to see her. Her father was frail, but alive. Her brother had grown into a wonderful young man. Without regret, Mulan gave her warrior's clothes to her little brother, and dressed in the clothes of a woman. She wrapped her hair in the style of the day. She added rouge to her cheeks. When she joined her family to watch the sun set, the warrior Mulan had transformed into a beautiful young woman.

Not long after, friends who had served with Mulan came to visit. Their eyes grew large when they saw the beautiful woman before them.

"Who are you?" they demanded to know. They could hardly believe their eyes when

Mulan answered.

Her story spread across China, to inspire young girls everywhere. If you love enough and have courage enough, you can accomplish anything, no matter how impossible it might seem to others.

The story of Mulan has been told many times, however, it was first seen in *The Ballad of Mulan*, part of *Musical Records of Old and New* and is part of *Music Bureau Collection* –Guo Maoqian, 11-12 Century, www.princeton.edu.

2.) Was Mulan a real person? _____

3.) Who was she trying to help? _____

4.) What did she do? _____

5.) Was she successful? _____

6.) Was this usual for a woman? _____



Ancient warrior costume – Sookmyung Women's University Museum



Hua Mulan goes to War on silk

Artist - Utagawa Kuniyoshi 1845



Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College

STEALING THE BELL

It's bad enough to try and deceive others; it's really silly when the only one you fool is yourself. Many times people will try to deceive others or themselves by saying something does not exist. They are really only fooling themselves.

Two thousand years ago, Lü Buwei told a vivid story about a man who did this.

Plugging One's Ears While Stealing a Bell

During the Spring and Autumn period, in the State of Jin, noble clan Zhi Bo destroyed Fan clan. Taking advantage of this occasion, a man went to Fan's family house and tried to steal something. As soon as the man entered the gate, he saw that there hung a big bell in the courtyard. The bell was cast in high-quality bronze, and was beautiful in design and shape.

The thief was very glad, and decided to carry this beautiful bell back home. But no matter how hard he tried, he could not move the bell, because the bell was big and heavy. He thought and thought again, and believed there was only one way to solve the problem. He had to break the bell into pieces and then carry them back to his home separately.

The thief found a big iron hammer, with which he struck the bell with all his might. The striking produced an enormous crashing sound, which made the thief terribly afraid that people would hear him stealing the bell.

The thief got flurried, thinking that it was too bad to have produced the crashing sound. He hugged the bell, trying to muffle the crashing sound with his arms. But how could the sound of the bell be muffled? The sound still kept drifting melodiously to distant places. The more he listened to the sound, the more frightened he became. He subconsciously shrank back, and covered his ears hard with his hands.

"Hey, the sound becomes fainter, inaudible!" the thief became cheerful at once, "Wonderful! The sound of the bell cannot be heard when the ears are covered."

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