

ESL Book Club 2022 – Book 3 Discussion Questions
Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin
Discussion Date: April 1, 2022 at 10:30 am – 12 pm

Grace Lin writes a story about a young girl in China named Minli called *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. In this story we learn how Minli becomes who she is, and how she rescues her village. Within this story or other stories about the lives of many wondrous creatures, which in the end all contribute to Minli's story and to its meaning.

1. Ma and Ba and Minli disagree over the value of stories. Ma thinks they are a waste of time and effort while Ba and Minli live for them. Do stories play an important role in your life? Give examples of stories (either true or false) that have affected your life in either a positive or negative way. For example, perhaps your story contained a dream of how to achieve a better life, and you followed this dream. Or maybe somebody in your past told a lie that changed your future irreparably.
2. Ba tells Minli the story of the *Old Man of the Moon*, but the goldfish tells her how to find the *Old Man of the Moon*. What is her own goal as she sets out on her quest?
3. Ma believes Minli is on a fool's errand, and Ma and Ba set out to find her. They do not succeed, which according to Ba would be as hard as finding the *Paper of Happiness*. What is the *Paper of Happiness*? This paper has only one word written on it. Is it the same word for everyone? Explain.
4. Meanwhile, Minli meets a dragon. Describe this dragon. What is unusual about him? What is his name?
5. What trick does Minli use to get past the monkeys? What weakness do the monkeys have that allows her to succeed?
6. To find the *Old Man of the Moon*, Minli first has to find the *Guardian of the City of Bright Moonlight*, whom she believes is the king. What poor but happy person helps her in the *City of Bright Moonlight*? Why is he happy?
7. Minli spends her money to feed a poor beggar, who turns out to be the king in disguise, and he eventually gives her the *Borrowed Line* necessary to find *The Old Man of the Moon*. She succeeds because she is completely selfless, preferring to use her money to feed a beggar than to use it for herself. In your opinion, do people usually succeed by being selfless or by putting themselves first? Can you give examples?
8. Dragon meets stone lions who call themselves the *Guardians of the City* and have their own version of the *Borrowed Line*. Which is the correct version?
9. Dragon saves Minli from the claws of a terrible, green tiger but is himself wounded by the tiger's poisonous claws. Tell the story of this tiger and how he came to be a tiger. Include the many places where this tiger's story and Minli's story intersect.

10. How do the twins trick the tiger into destroying himself? How is their town's story intertwined with the tiger's story? Grace Lin says the tiger's own anger is used to destroy him. Is anger always a destructive influence? If not, what extra factors make the tiger's anger lead to his destruction?
11. How is Dragon saved from the poison ?
12. Both *Borrowed Lines* are enlisted to reach the *Old Man of the Moon*. Tell the story of how Minli and Dragon accomplish this. Why must Dragon stay behind?
13. What is the story of the *Dragon's Pearl*? How many *Dragon's Pearls* are there? Does the moon look like a pearl to you?
13. Tell the story of Wu Kang and why he must forever cut the tree. What lesson must he learn before he can stop cutting it?
14. Minli is allowed to ask only one question of the *Man of the Moon*. She has made this trip to the *Man of the Moon* in order to find out how to make her parents and their village prosperous. What question does she ask? What sacrifice does she make in asking this question? What answer does she receive?
15. What object does Minli bring home that changes her destiny and that of everyone in the village? By thinking only of others and not of herself, in the end she receives all those things she wanted to ask for but didn't. Is the lesson to be learned that if we put others first, we will get the rewards we seek? Are we truly selfless if we expect this?
16. Suppose Minli had returned home and life had returned to what it was before the trip. At the beginning of Chapter 47 we read, "Minli? Minli! Ma and Ba's happiness burst from them like exploding firecrackers and even before she could open her eyes they had flung themselves upon her. The joy! How it flowed and flooded over her! More golden than the king's dragon bracelet, sweeter than a peach from the Queen Mother's garden, and more beautiful than a Goddess of Heaven! Minli smiled and treasured her good fortune." Does Minli need wealth and riches to be happy with the results of her quest? Does she grow as the result of her quest? Which is more important: To believe that if we do what is right we will receive riches and acclaim or to believe that we will experience the inner satisfaction of doing what is right? Why do most stories and fairy tales emphasize external rewards?