

SCHOLASTIC
FOCUS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

New York Times bestselling author of *Colors of the Mountain*

DA CHEN

红月女

GIRL
UNDER
A RED
MOON

GROWING UP DURING CHINA'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION



Grades 3-7

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The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are listed below. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1-7.1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.2-7.2;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3-7.3;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.4-7.4;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7-7.7;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2-7.2

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ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

- Reread chapter 3 which describes Sisi's educational experience at the middle school in Yellow Stone. In small groups, discuss the approach to schooling in China during the Cultural Revolution and compare it with public education in the United States today. Use your discussion to create an H-Chart that lists the basic facts about schooling in these two locations and eras in the two vertical columns. List the traits common to both in the connecting horizontal bar. Compare your group's H-Chart with another group's in your class.
- Sisi and her little brother encounter a new landscape and a new way of life when they venture into Bridge Town. Look carefully at the rich details describing the school and surrounding land in Bridge Town in chapter 11. Use this detailed description to create an illustration of the setting for this portion of the novel.
- Research the factors that led to the rise of communism in China under the direction of Chairman Mao and what happened in China after Mao's Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. Compile your research into an information report. Be sure to include facts, definitions, and concrete examples in your report. Select a format (written report, PowerPoint, Keynote) to share your information about communism in China with your classmates.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe the lifestyle Chen's family lived prior to 1949. How did the onset of communism in China affect the family's position in their village of Yellow Stone?
- Many aspects of life were dramatically changed under the communist government of Chairman Mao. How was education reorganized under the direction of Chairman Mao?
- Sisi, the oldest sister in the family, is described as a maternal figure to her youngest brother. Cite text evidence that supports the motherly role Sisi played in her brother's life.
- Much of Sisi's education is shaped by strict expectations for behavior and beliefs. Chen describes Sisi's relationship with her teacher, Mr. Ma, in this way: "Whatever Mr. Ma told her to do, Sisi did. He was the shepherd and she was his obedient lamb." How is this theme of strict expectations and obedience evident when Sisi goes to the Yellow Stone Revolutionary Red Guard Swearing In Ceremony with her class?

- With the Cultural Revolution, there were many changes to what was considered valuable in society. Anything that had been highly respected before—traditions, art, and education—was considered to be bad, and qualities that had previously been advantages were now considered to be disadvantages. How did the blessings and curses of Sisi's relatives affect her standing at school?
- What role did Jin Ju, the former Nationalist army officer turned goat shepherd, play in rescuing Sisi from disgrace and danger?
- Danger and violence surrounded those who were condemned as counterrevolutionaries. How do Sisi's classmates react to her expulsion? In particular, how does Crewcut implement a plan to humiliate Sisi and Da?
- Sisi has only a slip of paper with the principal's name on it as a means of introduction in Bridge Town. Why do you think Principal Jin was so accommodating to Sisi and Da?
- The injustices did not stop once Sisi and her brother arrived in Bridge Town. Describe what happened to her little brother while Sisi and her new roommate, Su Lan, were working in the fields and how the two girls reacted to the incident.
- How did Principal Jin demonstrate leadership when a typhoon hit Bridge Town on the cusp of harvesting the season's rice?
- Worse than the effects of the typhoon was the arrival of Commissar Lai to the school. What do you think the author meant when he said of the commissar's arrival, "An intruder had split the seam of our valley. A storm lay ahead, waiting for us."?
- Sisi's brother awoke one morning to the sound of an announcement from Commissar Lai. What did Da Chen mean when he wrote, "The curse of the Revolution was following us. The vast earth had run out of places for us to hide."?
- How is the true nature of Mrs. Lin revealed during Principal Jin's public condemnation and subsequent physical torture? Cite examples from the text.
- Chen says of Chairman Mao: "Mao had grown up a young revolutionary, zestfully trying to liberate our suffering nation from famine, corruption, warlords, and endless wars. In the end, however, he had become a ruthless, bitter emperor, letting his own desires rule his mind and darken his soul." How were the twins, the commissar, and Crewcut like Chairman Mao? How were Sisi and Da Chen different?
- What are some of the major themes in *Girl Under a Red Moon*? Give examples from the narrative to support your ideas.

GIRL UNDER A RED MOON: Growing Up During China's Cultural Revolution

By Da Chen

In a small village called Yellow Stone, in southeastern China, Sisi is a model sister, daughter, and student. She brews tea for her grandfather in the morning, leads recitations at school as class monitor, and helps care for her youngest brother, Da.

But when students are selected during a school ceremony to join the prestigious Red Guard, Sisi is passed over. Worse, she is shamed for her family's past—they are former landowners who have no place in the new communist order. Her only escape is to find work at another school, bringing Da along with her. But the siblings find new threats in Bridge Town, too, and Sisi will face choices between family and nation, between safety and justice. With the tide of the Cultural Revolution rising, Sisi must decide if she will swim against the current, or get swept up in the wave.

Bestselling author Da Chen paints a vivid portrait of his older sister and a land thrust into turmoil during China's tumultuous Cultural Revolution.

Michael Chen



Da Chen's life is a true immigrant success story. A native of China, Chen grew up in a tiny village without electricity or running water. He was a victim of communist political persecution during the Cultural Revolution but then went on to study at the Beijing Languages and Culture University. Da arrived in America at the age of twenty-three with only \$30 and a bamboo flute, and attended the Columbia University School of Law on a full scholarship. Da is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Colors of*

the Mountain, a memoir; *Sounds of the River*; *Brothers*; the middle-grade books *Wandering Warrior* and *Girl Under a Red Moon*; and several other titles. He lives in Southern California, with his family.



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