

Grace Lin

Grace Lin is the author and illustrator of picture books, early readers and middle grade novels. Her 2010 Newbery Honor book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is a OSOB selection. Many of Lin's books are about the Asian-American experience because she believes, "Books erase bias. They make the uncommon everyday and the mundane exotic. A book makes all cultures universal." Her most recent book, *When the Sea Turned to Silver*, is a National Book Award finalist.

What excites you about writing and illustrating for younger readers?

When I was a young reader, books were really important to me. In many ways, books became my friends. What I love about creating books for younger readers is that I might be creating books that could be their friends—just like the books I read at the same age.

How linked are the images and words for you in the creative process? Do they bolster each other while you are building a story?

Usually when I get an idea, I can visualize a single image and sometimes I even sketch it out. But after that one image, I focus on the writing and the story ... and usually that one image doesn't even make it into the book! So images and words are linked as inspiration for stories, but when I create a book, the words always come first.

Do your interactions with your readers influence or inspire your writing in any way?

They do! I visit a lot of schools and, about six years ago, I would tell students I was working on a companion book to *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. They would get so excited and kept asking me, "Is Minli going to be in it? Is Dragon?" and, at the time, I had to say, "No." And then one day, after I said that same answer to another group of kids, a boy looked at me, completely crushed, and said, "Why not?"

And it was then I realized I didn't have a good answer. I wasn't writing those characters because I thought it would be too hard, too complicated—but when the boy said that I realized that I was being lazy. Because I was writing a story and the beautiful things about stories is that anything can happen, there is always a way to figure things out.

So, because of my interaction with those readers, I stopped being lazy and went back to my writing desk to figure it out. And I am proud to say that I did! It took a long time (which is why it took six years to make!) but as well as being a complete story on its own, *When the Sea Turned to Silver* has all those characters—Minli, Magistrate Tiger, Dragon in it. They are all interwoven in there and I can't wait for kids to read about them again!

What is challenging about writing for this age group?

I think one of the challenging things for me is that I know that kids will catch anything I overlook. So I have to go over my book repeatedly to make sure I didn't miss anything!

How important is it to you that your books are reaching such a wide audience?

Well, this question speaks a lot to the diversity issue, something close to my heart. Books can be like windows that show us the world and they can be like mirrors that show us reflections of ourselves. We all need to read both types of books and I think too often kids end up with a bookshelf of all windows or all mirrors. It seems like a small thing, but I truly feel that having a balanced bookshelf of windows and mirrors are seeds to empathy and self-worth.

So it is very important to me that my books reach as wide an audience as possible. I think my books are an opportunity for kids to read outside their comfort zone and find they actually enjoy it—which hopefully leads to a further diversification of their bookshelf and a more empathetic and self-confident kid!

What has been your experience with the Read to Them *One School, One Book* program?

I love it! I spoke above a bit about the diversity—it's a many layered issue. Reading habits are hard to break, so sometimes because my books are not mirrors for them, people dismiss my books simply by looking at the cover. By being a part of the **Read to Them** program, people give the books a second chance. That is a huge game-changer. I can't tell you how many times I have heard, "I didn't think I would like your book, but now it's my favorite book in the whole world!"

Were you a big reader as a child? Which books most inspired you growing up?

Yes, I was always a big reader. Like I said, books were, in many ways, my friends. I loved *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Search for Delicious*, and *Betsy-Tacy*. They inspired me to try to make books that kids would love as much as I loved those.

Tell us about *When the Sea Turned to Silver* and how it serves as a companion book to previous novels *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* and *Starry River of the Sky*.

As I said, *When the Sea Turned to Silver* is a stand-alone book but it is related to *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* and *Starry River of the Sky*. You don't have to read the other books to understand *When the Sea Turned to Silver* but if you have, it is much added fun!

When the Sea Turned to Silver follows a young girl named Pinmei who lives with her grandmother on a secluded mountain. They hear that a new Emperor has come into power, an Emperor who is brutal and cruel. One night the Emperor and his soldiers come to Pinmei's hut and kidnap Pinmei's grandmother.

Everyone knows that the Emperor wants something called a Luminous Stone that Lights the Night, but no one know what it is. So, Pinmei—with her good friend Yishan—decides to go find one so they can save her grandmother. On the way, they meet up with magic, adventure and characters that readers of the other books might recognize.

Also like the other two books, there are stories within the main story—all inspired by real Chinese folk and fairy tales and it is illustrated in full color. I hope people like it!