

Grandfather Counts

written by Andrea Cheng
illustrated by Ange Zheng

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Format: Paperback, \$10.95
32 pages

ISBN: 9781584301585

Reading Level: Grade 2

Interest Level: Grades PreK–3

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
3.6/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD570L

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: Sharing & Giving, Overcoming Obstacles, Multiethnic interest, Immigration, Home, Grandparents, Friendship, Families, Education, Cultural Diversity, Childhood Experiences and Memories, Biracial/Multiracial Interest, Asian/Asian American Interest, Empathy/Compassion, Optimism/Enthusiasm, People In Motion, Realistic Fiction

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/grandfather-counts

SYNOPSIS

Gong Gong (Grandfather) is coming from China to live with Helen's family. Helen is excited, but anxious. How will she and her siblings, who know only English, communicate with Gong Gong, who speaks only Chinese?

At first Gong Gong keeps to himself, reading the Chinese newspapers he brought with him. Then one day, as Helen sits outside watching for the train that runs behind her house, Gong Gong joins her. He starts counting the train cars in Chinese, and then teaches Helen the words. Helen reciprocates by teaching Gong Gong to count in English. Soon Helen and Gong Gong are teaching each other more words, and a special bond between them begins to develop and grow.

A moving intergenerational story, *Grandfather Counts* highlights the universality of the love shared between grandparent and grandchild, a love that helps them cross the boundaries of language and culture.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Chinese Language

Mandarin is the official Chinese dialect in Mainland China and Taiwan and official written language for all of China. It is used by most Chinese schools and mainstream media. In the story, Gong Gong speaks Mandarin.

Chinese and English belong to different language families, making it challenging for speakers of each language to learn the other. While English uses letters to spell words and has an alphabet, the Chinese language uses symbols to represent entire words and does not have an alphabet. Chinese also uses pitch (highness or lowness) to change the meaning of words. Word order and verb tense are also handled differently in each language. For more information see <http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/chinese.htm>.

According to the Asia Society, Mandarin Chinese is the most widely spoken native language in the world with a billion speakers within China and 1.2 billion worldwide (<https://asiasociety.org/china-learning-initiatives/many-dialects-china>).

Filial Piety in China

Confucian tradition emphasizes “filial piety,” the duty of adult children to care for their aging parents. This is often seen as a repayment of the duty fulfilled by parents in raising and providing for their young children. This respect for the elderly extends to non-family members as well. For more information about cultural traditions related to caring for the elderly around the world, see <https://theweek.com/articles/462230/how-elderly-are-treated-around-world>.

Chinese Naming Traditions

Naming children in Chinese culture is a prized tradition. Chinese names usually have two or three characters. Family names come first; for instance, Yao Ming would be “Mr. Yao,” not “Mr. Ming,” in English. As in *Grandfather Counts*, children in a family of the same generation often all share a character in their names, either before or after a character chosen uniquely for them. Names for each child can relate to historical events, classic and pop culture, faith and superstition, or qualities families hope for in that child. It’s not as common as in other cultures for Chinese children to be named after specific ancestors or living family members.

For more information see <https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1002204/how-chinese-parents-pick-baby-names-with-character>

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Does anyone in your family speak a language other than English? What would it be like not to speak the same language as a family member?
- What would it be like to move to a new place and **not** speak the primary language used there? How might it change your actions?
- Do you spend time with your grandparents? What do you do together? Or, what might grandchildren and grandparents do or talk about together?
- If you had a grandparent move in with you, what might that be like? How might all the family members have to make adjustments?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, author/illustrator biography, title page, Mandarin-English glossary, dedication, and illustrations.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- what it's like when Gong Gong comes to live with Helen's family
- what Gong Gong and Helen teach each other
- how the characters change during the course of the story

Encourage students to consider why the author, Andrea Cheng, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

Content Specific

terminal, flashcards, Chinese Sunday school, Chinese characters, wallpaper, concrete, engineer, generation, train whistle

See words also included in the Mandarin-English Glossary

Academic

realized, connected, strokes, rumble, repeated, practiced, "by heart," copy, familiar

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who are the family members in this story? How are they all related?
2. What happens at the airport terminal?
3. How is Cece's room different than Helen's old room?
4. How did the family get Helen's old room ready for Gong Gong? What did Mom share about her childhood as they worked?
5. How does Gong Gong act once he's at Helen's house? What does Helen wonder about?
6. How do Gong Gong and Helen teach each other?

7. What does Dad talk about at dinner? How does the family respond? What new conversation does it spark?
8. What do the kids learn about their names at dinner?
9. What do Helen and Gong Gong do before bed?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How do you think Helen feels about Gong Gong's greeting in the airport? Do you think it went differently than she expected it to go?
2. How does Helen feel about not being able to communicate with Gong Gong? Give evidence from the text.
3. Why do you think the author included the scene about the wallpaper? How does hearing about Mom's childhood help readers understand the characters better?
4. What do you think Mom means, "He's my father. It's my duty to take care of him?"
5. What do you think Helen and Gong Gong both like watching for the train?
6. What do you think Gong Gong was thinking as he started to count the train cars in Chinese?
7. How is the mood at dinner different after Gong Gong and Helen count trains?
8. Do you think Gong Gong will use the computer program Dad talked about? Why or why not?
9. How do you think the kids felt when they learned more about their Chinese names?
10. How would you describe Gong Gong as a teacher? How would you describe Helen as a teacher?
11. What might Helen have been thinking and feeling as she went to bed after watching the train with Gong Gong?
12. How did the characters change over the course of the story?
13. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. When Mom was a little girl, Gong Gong told her, "When you do a job, always do it right." Why do you think Gong Gong thinks this is important? What does it show about a person? What are the things that you want to do right? Write a paragraph telling why it is important for you to do these jobs right.

2. Write an imaginary letter from Gong Gong to a friend or family member back in China. How would he describe the beginning of his time with Helen's family? What thoughts or feelings might he include?
3. Create a Venn diagram comparing Helen and Gong Gong. After filling in the diagram, write several sentences explaining how they are the same and how they are different.
4. Reflect on a time when you learned something new. How did it feel at first not to be good at that thing? How did it feel as you made progress? Who or what helped you learn? How can your experience connect to the story?
5. Reflect on how *Grandfather Counts* is a story about communication. Create a concept map for "communication." (For more information and templates see *Reading Rockets* https://www.readingrockets.org/strategies/concept_maps).

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Have students give a short talk about what it's like to move to a new place or learn a new language. Or, provide sentence frames to scaffold each student in making a short presentation about one of their grandparents or another family member.
4. The book contains some content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Flip through the pages of the book and focus on the characters' faces on each page. Describe how their faces look and name the emotions they convey. (You might also notice their body language.) Use sticky notes to label various emotions.
2. Discuss how sometimes one small decision or action can begin to change a relationship. How did Gong Gong's actions change his relationship with Helen? How did Helen's response make a difference? How does the mood of the entire family change when Gong Gong and Helen come inside from counting the train cars together? How could you learn from the characters' experiences to help in your own life?
3. How might the story have sounded differently if it been written from Gong Gong's perspective? Try imagining his thoughts and feelings as you flip through the pages. How might the story have sounded differently if Mom told it?
4. Everyone experiences newness differently. Try a new, simple task in your classroom, that nobody knows, such as a craft, a dance move, or a sports skill. After trying it out, have students get together in pairs and discuss how the experience felt for them. Reflect on the range of responses across your class.
5. Adapt Lesson 2 from the Building Classroom Community in 2nd Grade unit (https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/342/Building_Classroom_Community_in_Second_Grade_Lesson_Plan_2.pdf) to fit your class. Use *Grandfather Counts* to introduce an interview activity to help students practice having back-and-forth conversations, listen actively, and learn more about each other's families.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- Envision a sequel to *Grandfather Counts*. Ask students to think about what would happen in the follow-up story. Who would they choose to write about and why? What would happen in their story? Encourage students to create their sequel with accompanying illustrations.
- Gather or make simple props (e.g., a “train” out of six cardboard boxes strung together.) Have students act out the story, or specific scenes, ad-libbing the dialogue and focusing on using their facial expressions and body language to convey changing emotions.
- Read other books that describe relationships between grandchildren and grandparents. For instance, compare *Grandfather Counts* with *A Morning With Grandpa* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-morning-with-grandpa>), *Goldfish and Chrysanthemums* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/goldfish-and-chrysanthemums>), *Singing With Mama Lou* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/singing-with-momma-lou>), *Sunday Shopping* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sunday-shopping>), and *Hot, Hot Roti for Dada-ji* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/hot-hot-roti-for-dada-ji>). What do the main characters have in common? How are their experiences with their grandparents the same and how are they different?
- Use passages from the book to study narrative writing craft strategies. For instance, use the description of Gong Gong and Helen watching as the train approaches to model the writing strategy “show, don’t tell.” See additional articles for support on how to teach students about this particular technique of writing (<https://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/138/Activities-for-Image-Driven-Writing.aspx>) (https://www.csustan.edu/sites/default/files/groups/Writing%20Center/documents/showingvstelling_revised.pdf).

Social Studies, Geography & STEM

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Learn to count in other languages.** If students in your class speak languages other than English, invite them to be the teachers. Reflect on how it feels. What's hard about learning words in a new language? What feels good about it?
- **Try out writing Chinese characters.** Talk about how, as Gong Gong references in the story, stroke order is important in Chinese writing. Try printing Chinese characters and asking students to trace them with a highlighter using the correct stroke order. Then, they can choose a character to try writing themselves. Education.com offers various printables at <https://www.education.com/worksheets/chinese/>. Reflect on what's challenging about writing in Chinese if you aren't used to it. Talk about what might have been hard for Gong Gong in learning to write Helen's name in English.

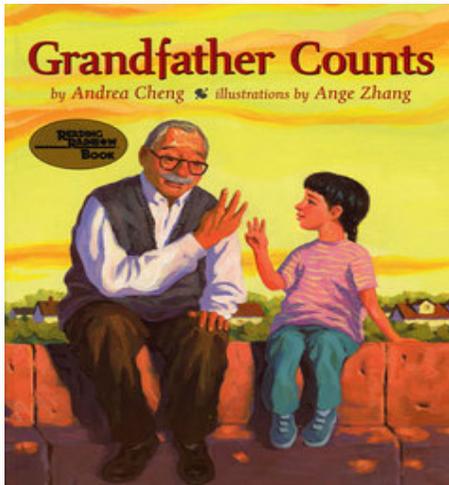
School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have each student as an adult family member or older community member about something they watched or waited for as a child, the way Helen liked to watch the train.** Ask questions to learn more details. Use the details to create a picture of that adult as a child, watching and waiting for that thing. Share responses at school.
- **Ask students to talk to their family members to learn more about how their names were chosen.** Or, if this isn't possible, have students research the meanings of their names. Share responses at school.
- **As a class or individually, have students interview several people who learned a new language in their lifetime.** Compare and contrast the different experiences shared.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrea Cheng was the author of several critically-acclaimed books for young readers. Her works range from picture books to young adult novels, and her stories often draw on the experiences of her Hungarian relatives or her husband's Chinese family. When not writing books, Cheng taught English as a Second Language at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College. She passed away in late 2015. Learn more about her work at www.andreacheng.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Ange Zheng has illustrated several children's books, including *The Fishing Summer* and *Winter Rescue*. A former designer at the Beijing Opera Company in China, he now lives in Canada.

Ordering Information

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New York, NY 10016

REVIEWS

"Cheng's story of a Chinese-speaking grandfather who comes to live with his daughter's English-speaking family ably communicates the difficulties of the language barrier, and the unanticipated joys that come from working your way through that barrier." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Conveying nuggets of Chinese culture as well as bits of the language, Cheng's story hints honestly at the difficulties of resettling an aged, non-English-speaking relative, and in velvety colors, Zhang's acrylics paint the growing relationship with simple integrity." —*Booklist*

"Eventually, the little girl in the story finds some common ground with Gong Gong— and she even manages to learn a little Mandarin— in this heartwarming picture book." —*Hapamama.com*

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

Lee & Low Books is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.