THE FLUTE: Teachers' Guide

SUMMARY:

The Flute is an original (as in made up by the author) fictional story, written in the style of a folktale, and set in India.

"*Long ago and far away, in a village on the banks of a rushing river, a baby girl was born. The mother cuddled her baby and gazed up at the full moon, glowing in a sky like blue honey.*

"Chandra," murmured the mother. "I'll call you Chandra after the moon."

As Chandra grew, she followed her mother like a shadow. Each day she helped her parents in the fields. Each evening she went with them to the banks of the great river. There her mother played her old wooden flute. She played of shimmering hot days and the richness of the earth. She played of the cool evening sky and the growing promise of the moon."

Then disaster strikes the village and Chandra's parents are swept away in a flood. Taken in by a cruel aunt and uncle, Chandra's only solace is her mother's old flute, which helps Chandra in mysterious ways. When another flood sweeps through the village, the flute helps Chandra to cross the river and find a new and happier home. This is a story about resilience and hope, the enduring power of love, and the power of music to pull a young girl through the shadows to discovering her own strength and light.

GENERAL THEMES AND CONNECTIONS:

1) Music

* the power of music to heal
* the magical power of music

2) Floods

3) Droughts

4) Emerging from shadows to light

* becoming one's own person
* healing after hardship

5) Resilience and hope in the face of disaster

6) Folktales and the nature of folktales

7) Superstitions

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES:

1) Topics of Discussion:

* Why do you think the story starts: “Long ago and far away...”?

* What does Chandra’s name mean?

* Have you heard of floods like the one in this story?

* Chandra’s mother plays of “shimmering hot days and the richness of the earth; of the cool evening sky and the growing promise of the moon.” Discuss this. How can music tell stories? Can music create moods?

* What instrument does Chandra’s mother play? What is your favourite instrument? Do you play any music?

* Discuss the kinds of music you love. What kinds of moods does it create in you?

* The flute music helps Chandra stay close to her mother. Do you know music that makes you feel close to a member of your family?

* When you feel sad, can music help you?

* When Chandra is hungry and hears the flute music, what does it sing of? Do you think music can make food? What kind of food does the flute sing for Chandra? What does that tell you about where the story is set? Have you had Indian food? What is your favourite kind of food?

* What is a drought? Have you heard of any? Discuss what happens during a drought. Have you experienced dry spells in the summer? What is it like?

* Why do you think Chandra’s uncle and aunt blame her for the drought and then the flood? What does the word “superstition” mean? Discuss superstitions. Do you have any?

* When the flood waters rise again, how does the flute help Chandra?

* After Chandra crosses the river with the rope, she finds that she is holding on to the flute. Discuss this.

* Throughout the story there is mention of shadows, e.g.: “As Chandra grew, she followed her mother like a shadow”; “she became thinner and quieter, fading into a shadow”; “from out of the shadows stepped a man and a woman.” What do you think this means? Do you think this has something to do with Chandra coming out of her mother’s shadow to become her own person? Do you think this ties into Chandra playing the flute at the end, the way her mother used to? The

last line of the book is: “But always she played of the hope and enduring strength of the moon.” How does that tie into what Chandra’s name means? Do you think it might refer to Chandra having discovered her own strength?

* Name meanings: discuss what names mean? If you don’t know what your name means, what would you like it to mean?

* Look through the book and see how the moon appears in different parts of the story. What do you think this means? How does the appearance of the moon reflect what is happening in the story?

* If you had a magic flute that could play you anything, what would you want?

* What does this story say about hope and the power of music? Do you think Chandra too, kept her hope alive by remembering her mother’s songs?

2) Writing exercises:

* Write down five words to describe a river

* Write down five words that describe the sound of a river

* Write down five words to describe hot dry weather

* Have the class listen to a piece of music of your choosing. Have the students write five words to describe that music.

* Write a scene where a magical instrument plays your favourite food for you. What would it be? Describe the food using all five senses.

* Music and mood exercise: Select two different songs, in different keys. Have students listen to the music then write down how they feel when listening to each song.

* Make up and write a story about a magical instrument of your choice playing you something you want.

* Write about your favourite musical instrument and why you like it best.

* Describe a rainy day and what you like to do on such a day.

* Write a letter Chandra might write to her parents, after they are lost in the flood.

* Write a few paragraphs about your favourite music. Explain why it’s your favourite as well as how it makes you feel.

3) Art Projects:

* Draw a picture of Chandra working in the fields with her new family

* Play a piece of music for the class and have students draw a picture of what the music looks like to them

* Draw a picture of the flood sweeping away the village

* Draw a picture of a rainy day

* Draw a picture of the food you'd want a magic flute to create for you.

* In groups, make a poster with pictures of your favourite foods.

* In groups make a poster associated with rain. Include pictures of clouds, raincoats, umbrellas, rain, and anything else you can think of.

* In groups make a poster titled Drought. Include pictures you can find of dry river beds, brown grass, etc.

4) Drama:

* Act out three scenes: of Chandra in the fields with her mother and father; of Chandra with her aunt and uncle; of Chandra with her new family.

* Act out a scene of a flood and the villagers fleeing to high ground and chasing Chandra away.

* Act out a scene of Chandra's cousin watching her as the flute plays her food, then running home to tell his parents what he saw.

5) Extra Study and Research activities:

* Read up about floods and write a report

* Do a report on Indian food including what a plantain leaf is and how it is used as a plate.

* Research food from three different countries and make a poster showing and describing the foods.

* Research and report on the rain cycle.

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