

Nectar in a Sieve/ The Woman Warrior

Curriculum Unit



Nectar in a Sieve

Kamala Markandaya

The Woman Warrior

Maxine Hong Kingston

Curriculum Unit

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Contents

| | Page | Handouts |
|--|------|----------------|
| Introduction | v | |
| Teacher Notes | vi | |
| <i>Nectar in a Sieve</i> | 1 | |
| 1 Entering Rukmani's World | 3 | 1, 2, 3 |
| 2 From Monsoon to Drought | 9 | 4, 5, 6 |
| 3 Escalating Difficulties | 15 | 7, 8, 9 |
| 4 In the City | 21 | 10, 11, 12 |
| 5 Markandaya's Use of Tools of Fiction | 27 | 13, 14, 15, 16 |
| 6 Themes of <i>Nectar in a Sieve</i> | 35 | 17, 18, 19 |
| Supplementary Materials | | |
| Quiz Questions | 42 | |
| Quiz Answer Key | 47 | |
| Culminating Activities | 48 | |
| <i>The Woman Warrior</i> | 49 | |
| 1 No Name Woman | 51 | 1, 2, 3 |
| 2 Fa Mu Lan | 57 | 4, 5 |
| 3 The Sitting Ghost | 61 | 6, 7, 8 |
| 4 Moon Orchid | 67 | 9, 10, 11 |
| 5 The Girl Who Would Not Talk | 73 | 12, 13, 14, 15 |
| 6 Considerations of Genre | 79 | 16, 17, 18 |
| Supplementary Materials | | |
| Quiz Questions | 86 | |
| Quiz Answer Key | 91 | |
| Culminating Activities | 92 | |

Introduction

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* is fiction, the story of a woman's life in rural India. Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is autobiography, about growing up Chinese-American in California. What do two such diverse works share in common? Both tell engaging stories, sometimes amusing, sometimes troubling. Both are written by contemporary female authors and feature strong female main characters. Both are set in rich and ancient ethnic traditions reflecting our multicultural world. Both prompt questions about gender roles.

Similarities aside, the works differ greatly. *Nectar in a Sieve* uses a traditional narrative approach, flashback relating events in chronological order. Rukmani, the main character, describes the great joys and terrible sorrows of her life as the wife of a tenant rice farmer in a village on the brink of industrial change. Adolescents and adults alike find the novel readable, interesting, and encouraging, as it reveals the courage and endurance of the human spirit.

The Woman Warrior is a complex blend of personal memories, family stories, and Chinese legends and myths. It is the new kind of autobiography, not in the rags-to-riches tradition of Ben Franklin. Instead, Kingston describes her experience of growing up caught between the demands of Chinese and American cultures. The narration is not chronological; rather, Kingston interweaves past and present, fact and imagination. This thought-provoking work challenges readers. In high schools, it is most suitable for upper-level students, who often respond with lively discussion and follow up with memorable writing of their own.

Nectar in a Sieve and *The Woman Warrior* are wonderful components of courses that emphasize multicultural studies, women in literature, and great works. Both show that fact and fiction most often overlap and work together in the service of truth.

Teacher Notes

This unit presents six lessons to teach Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* and six lessons to teach Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Many of the lessons will span more than one class session. All are accompanied by reproducible handouts for students' use. Teacher materials provide background about the works and authors and suggest responses to discussion questions. Lessons are based on a step-by-step reading of the works.

The part on *Nectar in a Sieve* divides the novel into four sections. Reading assignments are as follows: chapters 1–6 for Lesson 1; chapters 7–13 for Lesson 2; chapters 14–23 for Lesson 3; chapters 24–30 for Lesson 4; the entire novel for Lessons 5–6. The first five lessons on *The Woman Warrior* are based consecutively on the work's five sections, the sixth lesson on the book as a whole.

Lessons integrate possibilities for individual, small group, and large group work. Quizzes may be used for evaluation; less formally used, they can help students to review understanding either individually or in small groups. An answer key is provided. Many handouts throughout the unit serve as useful tools for evaluation. Suggested answers are provided except when responses are open-ended. Culminating activities suggest research topics, related readings, imaginative writing, and topics for critical analysis.

Lessons prompt examination of plot, character, theme, point of view, setting, and literary forms. Materials also highlight central values that dominate the works. For *Nectar in a Sieve*, these include endurance, family commitment, integrity, loyalty, respect, and truth. For *The Woman Warrior*, values emphasized include compassion, courage, equality, integrity, justice, self-actualization, and truth.

Nectar in a Sieve

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* tells a moving story of endurance, love, and loyalty in India. Rukmani, the main character and narrator, now an elderly woman, tells the story of her life and family in a changing India. She and her husband are tenant farmers, engaged in the timeless struggle to benefit from nature's blessings and to survive its calamities. In this aspect, the novel compares with other classics such as John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*.

The novel also confronts the changes that come with industrialization. When a tannery opens a continuously expanding facility in the village, Rukmani and her family, as well as all of the other villagers, are drawn into inevitable social and economic upheaval.

Finally, *Nectar in a Sieve* also draws readers into a rich cultural experience of India's sounds, tastes, smells, beliefs, and philosophies. One leaves the novel with a deep appreciation of Rukmani's heritage and a profound respect for her warm humanity in celebrating life's joys and enduring its sufferings.

Kamala Markandaya is the pen name of Kamala (Purnaiya) Taylor, who was born in 1924 to Brahmin parents in India. She was educated at Madras University and went on to a career as a journalist, then as a novelist. In 1948 she moved to London, where she married an Englishman. Her novels are published and widely read in India, the United States, and the United Kingdom. *Nectar in a Sieve* was her first published novel (1954).

Lesson 1

Entering Rukmani's World

Objectives

- To understand events and characters early in the novel
- To recognize examples of foreshadowing and to make inferences about them

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapters 1–6 of *Nectar in a Sieve*. The opening paragraphs introduce the first-person narrator, whom we soon learn is a woman named Rukmani. As the story begins, she is elderly, but she quickly launches into the flashback that constitutes the rest of the novel. The first six chapters cover about fifteen years from her arranged marriage, at the age of twelve, to the tenant farmer Nathan, to the celebration of the marriage of her oldest child and only daughter, Irawaddy.

These opening chapters present days of prosperity for Rukmani and her growing family. Major events include Rukmani's settling happily and productively into her new home, the birth of her first child, her fear of having no more children, her meeting with Kenny (Dr. Kennington), the arrival of five sons in quick succession, and the building of the tannery.

Markandaya presents numerous incidents of foreshadowing, sometimes sunny promises, sometimes cloudy warnings about events to come. She also provides a sensitive characterization of Rukmani, with her tender love for growing things and fierce devotion to family.

Procedure

1. Use Quiz 1 as an evaluation tool or as a way for students to review chapters 1–6.
2. Allow a few minutes for free responses to the novel. Invite students to surface questions, perceptions, and areas of special interest.
3. Have students complete **Handout 1**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *The narrator, an old woman, lives with her son, daughter, and Puli, whose hands are damaged. Her husband is gone, perhaps dead, and she seems to have happy memories of him. She apparently has difficulty with her vision. She has lived in this area for some time. She also mentions someone named Kenny.*
2. *In the fifth paragraph the narrator goes back many years in time to begin the story in her childhood. The paragraph initiates the long flashback that composes the rest of the novel.*
3. *The first two daughters had lavish wedding ceremonies, with gifts, feasts, precious metals and stones, and much celebration. The third daughter had a small wedding and only one small piece of jewelry. The fourth, the narrator, had no dowry and married a poor tenant farmer. The narrator's father, once the village headsman, came to have little prestige.*
4. *Possibilities abound, including the following: marrying at a very early age; arranged marriages; exotic names; travel by bullock-drawn cart; Indian foods; washing at the river; subsistence farming.*
5. *Kali is large, friendly, cheerful, talkative, and earthy; her husband works the field next to Nathan's. Janaki is not pretty and seems worn out; her husband has a shop in the village. Kunthi is young, pretty, graceful, reserved, and pregnant; she has not been married long.*

6. Kali addresses her as Rukmani when they meet on the day they are all washing clothes.
 7. Nathan is a hard-working farmer and a tender husband. He is kind, gentle, humble, and appreciative of Rukmani.
 8. Kali tells of Nathan's nervousness before the wedding and of his building the little house for Rukmani.
 9. He gets a wife who lacks the skills needed in their home. In this case, Rukmani has to learn how to be a farmer's wife—and learn she does!
 10. She grows from a young, timid, nervous child bride to a productive and responsive young wife.
4. Have a student read aloud the paragraphs early in chapter 1 that deal with Rukmani's birth family. Point out that here, before Nathan is even introduced to the reader, she provides hints about the future. Explain that this is an example of foreshadowing, a literary device that Markandaya employs frequently in the novel.
 5. Have students complete part A of **Handout 2**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Something about the wedding went very wrong, at least for the narrator. The story is likely to explain the irony of her joyous expectations not being fulfilled.*
2. *Here the foreshadowing seems positive. How will Jeff pursue and achieve success in the city?*
3. *The narrator may or may not achieve the success he/she craves, but it is clear that the story will describe struggles and difficulties.*
4. *The fortune to be told is probably negative. Will it come true, or not?*
5. *The narrator and others clearly survive this disaster, at least partly by their own efforts. The story will describe their experiences.*

6. Divide the class into small groups, and assign each group a section of part B of **Handout 2**. Then have groups share responses with the entire class.

Sample Responses:

Chapter 1: *Rukmani's comments about relatives' assessments of her marriage promise (foreshadow) that she has made a good match. She states explicitly that troubled times came later, after a period of peace and contentment. Kunthi's aloofness may foreshadow trouble.*

Chapter 2: *The encounter with the cobra suggests that danger can strike in unexpected ways.*

Chapter 3: *Rukmani's mother says that she will have sons.*

Chapter 4: *Rukmani states explicitly that the tannery blasts change into their lives. She feels that it will endanger them and their way of life.*

Chapter 5: *The opening sentence suggests that the years of tenancy will terminate.*

Chapter 6: *The new son-in-law "seemed" to fulfill their wishes. Guests comment that the match seems "too good to be true."*

7. Point out how often food is a topic in the first six chapters. Nathan grows rice, and Rukmani cares for a productive garden. Explain that for villages dependent on small farms, hunger is always just around the corner. When the harvest is good, people eat relatively well, but the harvest depends on good growing weather. Have students discuss ways this is true even in a wealthy country like the United States. For example, major floods can wipe out farmers along the Mississippi; drought can ruin a vegetable crop in California.

8. Have students complete **Handout 3**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Much of their time is spent in growing, harvesting, and processing food.*
2. *Nathan's farm is a rice paddy. Rice is the dietary staple in this culture.*
3. *Rukmani describes her lush garden and its colorful produce, including pumpkins, beans, and peppers. She is proud of her garden and its products, but she also marvels at the miracles of life and growth. See chapter 2, for example.*
4. *Rukmani mentions rice, dahl (lentils), coconut, wheatcakes, sugar, butter, and milk curds. According to her, they eat very well.*
5. *Although she likes Old Granny and dislikes Biswas, she makes the change because Biswas pays more. With her growing family, she needs the money.*
6. *With more children, the amount of food has to stretch further. Each person gets less. The family can no longer afford milk, curds, and butter. Still, they do not go hungry. They have rice, beans, and fish.*
7. *She mentions that some of the families do go hungry.*
8. *Rukmani has been saving for fourteen years for Irawaddy's wedding! She provides a feast, including rich cakes, for a large crowd of wedding guests.*
9. *She has used up most of her store of food and money for the wedding. She has a large family to feed. One bad harvest could be a serious problem.*

The World of *Nectar in a Sieve*

Directions: Chapter 1 introduces the novel's setting, main characters, and thematic concerns. Use the following questions to clarify your understanding.

1. Reread the first four paragraphs. What do you learn about the narrator?
2. What happens to the time setting between paragraph 4 and paragraph 5?
3. What evidence reveals that the narrator's parents experienced financial decline?
4. What cultural practices in the first chapter differ from the practices of your culture?
5. Name and describe the three neighbor women introduced in the chapter.
6. How and when do we learn the narrator's name?
7. Name and describe the narrator's husband.
8. What does Kali say that changes Rukmani's view of her home and husband?
9. Why does Rukmani think it is not very lucky for a man to marry above himself?
10. How does Rukmani change during the course of chapter 1?

Foreshadowing at Work

Part A.

Directions: Authors often use foreshadowing, a technique of providing clues about future events. Foreshadowing ranges from very direct to extremely subtle. It may wet the reader’s curiosity, prompt ironic realizations, warn of events to come, or promise a happy ending. Read the following examples of foreshadowing, and infer what they suggest about future events.

1. For months I waited with eager anticipation for Lisa’s wedding. My bridesmaid’s dress was stunning, all of the guests were friends and family, and the reception promised to be the best party ever. If I had known then what I know now, I would have hopped on the first train and gone far, far away.
2. Jeff stepped out of the cab onto a city street choked with traffic and pedestrians. He could feel excitement throbbing in the air, promising, “This is your town, this is your town! Welcome home!”
3. Above all I wanted to be a star on the Broadway stage. I had the looks, the talent, the ambition and the right contacts. Success seemed all but inevitable. How little I knew!
4. The old fortune-teller’s bleary eyes gazed sadly into the crystal ball. “No,” she said. “I won’t tell you. Don’t make me tell you!”
5. I remember hearing a terrific explosion, and then seeing the floor crumble under my feet. Sirens began to scream, but louder still was the roar of flames rushing up the side of the building. Later, I wondered how we ever managed to crawl to safety.

Part B.

Directions: Find examples of foreshadowing in chapters 1–6 of *Nectar in a Sieve*. Then infer how they might serve as promises or warnings.

| | Foreshadowing | Promise or warning? |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Chapter 1 | | |
| Chapter 2 | | |
| Chapter 3 | | |
| Chapter 4 | | |
| Chapter 5 | | |
| Chapter 6 | | |

The Threat of Hunger

Directions: Use the following questions to consider the roles of food and hunger in the opening chapters of *Nectar in a Sieve*.

1. How do Nathan and Rukmani spend most of their time?
2. Describe Nathan's farm.
3. What details does Rukmani use to describe her garden? How does she feel about it?
4. At the end of chapter 1 Rukmani describes some of the foods she and Nathan eat. What do they eat? Do they have enough to eat?
5. Why does Rukmani shift most of her business from Old Granny to Biswas?
6. By the end of chapter 3, how has the daily diet of Rukmani and her family changed? Why?
7. What does Rukmani suggest about the welfare of others in the village?
8. How does food play a role in the celebration of Irawaddy's wedding?
9. By the end of chapter 6, what dangers might threaten Rukmani's family? Why?

Lesson 2

From Monsoon to Drought

Objectives

- To understand events from the great monsoon to the drought
- To describe Markandaya's portrait of roles of men and women in rural India
- To analyze the emerging role of Kenny

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapters 7–13, which present many afflictions for Rukmani and her family. First, a terrible monsoon destroys the crops and devastates the village. Then Irawaddy's husband returns her to her parents because she has had no children in the five years of their marriage. Arjun and Thambi, the oldest two sons, get in trouble during a labor strike at the tannery and lose their jobs, thus losing the family a valued source of income; the two boys later leave home forever for work in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Then, as a result of a terrible drought, Rukmani and Nathan have no money to pay their dues to the landowner; only by pawning nearly everything they own are they able to make partial payment. By the end of chapter 13, they seem to have been stripped of hope.

Kamala Markandaya's portrayal of gender roles and relationships is quite interesting. While Nathan and Rukmani accept largely traditional roles, they also seem to transcend them. In contrast to the carefully protected Muslim women, Rukmani sees herself as free and able to mix freely with men. She and Nathan are co-workers, friends, and lovers.

Of all of the characters in the novel, Kenny is the one Rukmani understands least. Readers coming from a Western liberal tradition may be able to comprehend his motivation to provide medical help in a seemingly hopeless situation. Today's students, conditioned by talk shows and scandals, sometimes conclude that Kenny fathers Rukmani's first son. However, nothing in the novel seems to justify that conclusion.

Procedure

1. Begin by having students use **Quiz 2** as an evaluation tool or as a way to review comprehension of chapters 7–13.
2. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the opening paragraph of chapter 7. Write the terms of the simile on the chalkboard: nature = a wild animal. Ask students to explain Rukmani's meaning. Lead them to see that farmers, as well as other people, sometimes feel that they have learned to control or manage nature, as a lion tamer may feel in control of a lion. Yet, at any moment, the balance of power can shift, with destructive results.
3. Have students complete **Handout 4**.
 1. *Answers may include floods, tornadoes, fires, wild animals, thunderstorms, hailstorms, epidemics, and other situations.*
 2. *Rukmani describes a violent monsoon season and a severe drought, with at least six or seven years between them.*
 3. *The garden and rice paddy are virtually destroyed. Still, others in the village are affected far more severely. Rukmani and Nathan are able to eke out survival until the next harvest.*
 4. *Deepavali is a moment of joyful celebration and relative prosperity; it also marks a celebration of the love between Rukmani and Nathan. The festival illustrates that the villagers' lives are not just a series of woes.*
 5. *Images include the cloudless sky, diminishing river, brown crops, cracked earth, and dying animals.*
 6. *To sell the seed is to give up hope, for the seed is the basis of the next harvest.*
 7. *The closing paragraph of chapter 13 is a low point in the novel so far. When the drought finally ends, the people seem to have had the hope parched out of them.*

4. Point out that *Nectar in a Sieve* was written by a female novelist; its narrator and main character is a woman; many of the other characters are women. Ask students to brainstorm gender specific roles in the novel.

Sample Responses:

Women prepare meals and take care of children; men are the primary providers and decision-makers; women are submissive; women and men share work.

5. Have students complete **Handout 5**.

Sample Responses:

1. *A dowry consists of money and goods a woman brings her husband when she marries him. A dowry may enhance her attractiveness as a potential wife; it may enable her to marry into a higher class. Without a dowry, a woman may have to marry "below herself."*
2. *Irawaddy's physical beauty makes up for her having only a small dowry.*
3. *This is a culture that places a high value on having sons.*
4. *Rukmani always accords Nathan the respect due a husband; as she says, she never referred to him by his name, but always as "husband." Still, between them there is an equality of respect and affection.*
5. *From the beginning, Kunthi seems different—aloof, unfriendly, inexplicably hostile toward Rukmani. With the changes brought by the tannery, she acquires a bad reputation as a "trollop." In the encounter with Rukmani early in Chapter 11, it is evident that Kunthi is a prostitute and a vicious, suspicious woman.*
6. *Unlike Rukmani and her friends, the Muslim women spend their lives closed in and waited on by servants. When they leave their homes, they are heavily veiled. Rukmani pities them for not experiencing sunshine, fresh air, and normal interactions with men.*

7. *His rejection seems to be based totally on her apparent infertility. She has failed in a primary role as provider of children. Ironically, as Nathan's experience shows, having sons does not necessarily mean having helpers.*

8. *Men and women play fairly "traditional" roles in the novel. Yet Rukmani and Nathan are much more to each other than mere role players. Complementarity is possible, as the two work as partners and live together as lovers.*

6. Point out that Kenny (Dr. Kennington) moves in and out of the novel as he moves in and out of Rukmani's life. Ask students to describe him.

Suggested Responses:

He is the tall, thin white doctor who helps ease Rukmani's mother's death, who helps Rukmani with her infertility problem, and who becomes a friend of the family.

7. Have students complete part A of **Handout 6**.

Suggested Responses:

Chapter 3: Kenny provides drugs that ease Rukmani's mother's death; he is sensitive enough to notice that something else is bothering Rukmani; when she tells him she has no sons, he offers to try to help, but he makes no guarantees. When she expresses fear, he responds brusquely that he will not harm her.

Chapter 5: Rukmani greets Kenny as her benefactor, and he seems amused at the success of his treatment, as she now has five sons. He sometimes criticizes her quite frankly. As always, he comes and goes almost mysteriously. He becomes a frequent visitor to their home.

Chapter 7: An angry Kenny meets Rukmani and Nathan just after the monsoon. He expresses frustration at the passivity of the poor and suffering people.

Chapter 11: Rukmani goes to see Kenny about Irawaddy's infertility. He is tired and rude. He then agrees to try to help, but makes no promises.

Chapter 12: Kenny gets Rukmani's third son a job as a servant in a city. He says that he has a family, but that he comes and goes as he pleases. It seems that he is ambivalent, drawn to help the poor and suffering in India, repelled by their poverty and helplessness.

8. Conduct a general discussion based on part B of **Handout 6**.

Sample Responses:

1. *Kenny seems to feel called to be a sort of medical missionary. He clearly wants to do something about the sick and starving masses.*
2. *To him they seem overly passive; they accept the limits of their situation. He, coming from his Western background, feels that they should do something to change things.*
3. *Rukmani does not describe the treatment for her infertility. It seems probable from her character, from his, from the nature of their relationship, and from health facts throughout the novel, that the basic problem may have been nutritional or hormonal. It is highly unlikely that Kenny fathered any of her children.*
4. *Almost any family would find itself disrupted by a lifestyle like Kenny's. One wonders if he would receive any more understanding at home than he does in India.*
5. *They come from very different cultures and philosophies. When Kenny suggests that people should do something about their poverty, Rukmani genuinely does not know what he means. When she suggests that there is nothing they can do, he fails to understand.*

The Wild Beast in Nature

Directions: Reread the opening paragraph of chapter 7 in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Then answer the following questions.

1. Describe a time when you have observed the “wild animal” in nature.
2. In chapters 7–13 Rukmani describes two serious natural disasters. What are they? How much time elapses between them?
3. How does the monsoon affect Rukmani and her family? How does it affect the rest of the village?
4. Chapter 10 describes the feast of Deepavali. What does Rukmani’s description of the feast add to this section of the novel?
5. Find specific images that convey the severity of the drought in chapter 13.
6. Why does Rukmani insist that Nathan should not sell the seed?
7. How severely does the drought seem to affect Rukmani and her family?

Women's Roles in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Directions: Use the following questions to consider the role of women in the world of Markandaya's novel.

1. What is a dowry? Why are the characters' dowries so significant in planning their marriages?
2. Why can Irawaddy make a good match despite the fact that she has only a small dowry?
3. Why is Rukmani unsatisfied with having only one child?
4. How equal are Rukmani and Nathan?
5. Focus on Kunthi. How well does she fit in with the other women? How do they judge her? How has she changed from the beginning of the novel to the end of chapter 13?
6. Describe the lives of the Muslim women. What does Rukmani think of them? Why?
7. Why does Irawaddy's husband reject her? What ironies are apparent in this rejection?
8. Considering your responses to the questions above, write a description of the roles of men and women in the culture depicted in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

The Enigmatic Kenny

Part A.

Directions: From chapter 3 on, Kenny (Dr. Kennington) moves in and out of the novel. Rukmani herself does not completely understand him, although she does trust him. Find the passages that deal with Kenny in each of the following chapters; state what he does, and then record what he says.

| Actions | Words |
|------------|-------|
| Chapter 3 | |
| Chapter 5 | |
| Chapter 7 | |
| Chapter 11 | |
| Chapter 12 | |

Part B.

Directions: Use your answers to part A and your understanding of Western culture to answer the following questions.

1. Why does Kenny spend so much time in India?
2. Why is he so easily frustrated with the very poor people he has come to help?
3. What did he do to help Rukmani with her inability to have more children after Irawaddy?
4. What effects might his lifestyle have on his own family?
5. Why do Rukmani and Kenny understand each other only partially?

Lesson 3

Escalating Difficulties

Objectives

- To analyze the portrayal of Kunthi
- To distinguish and describe Rukmani's children
- To analyze the novel's central conflicts

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapters 14–23, bringing the class to the end of Part One of the novel. The section begins with the family's agonizing effort to survive and rebuild after the drought and concludes with Rukmani and Nathan deciding to leave the village to live with their third son (Murugan) in the city. Major events in between include Kunthi's treachery toward both Rukmani and Nathan, the killing of Raja at the tannery, Rukmani's mistaken attack on Irawaddy, Kuti's death, Kenny's return, Selvam's decision to work with Kenny, Irawaddy's pregnancy and the birth of her albino son, the death of Old Granny, and the news that the owner of Nathan's farmland has decided to sell it to the tannery.

From the beginning of the novel, Kunthi has always been either aloof or hostile with Rukmani. This section reveals at least part of the reason, the fact that Nathan fathered Kunthi's sons. Rukmani judges Kunthi as evil. Readers may certainly agree that the woman is selfish and dishonest, but may question whether she is more a victim than a victimizer.

By the end of Part One, two of Rukmani's children are dead and two have moved far away. One has been out of touch in the city for a long time. In the village only two remain—Irawaddy and Selvam—and Rukmani and Nathan themselves are ready to leave. They have survived monsoon and lived through drought, but they cannot withstand the encroachment of the tannery.

Procedure

1. Use Quiz 3 as an evaluation tool or as a way for students to review events in chapters 14–23.
2. Point out that chapter 13 ends with the termination of the great drought. Chapter 14 begins with the family's desperate efforts to survive until a new harvest.

Ask: What character nearly ruins the family's chance to survive? Lead students to see that Kunthi, who has been a negative presence since the beginning of the novel, makes an almost deadly presence here. Have the class complete **Handout 7**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Kunthi is always cool and aloof, but especially so with Rukmani. In chapter 1 Rukmani blames her own imagination for perceiving a barrier between them. In retrospect, we see that Kunthi's coldness probably resulted from her affair with Nathan.*
2. *Kunthi does not want Rukmani to attend the birth of what is actually Nathan's son.*
3. *Nathan is angry and disturbed, which Rukmani interprets as a sign of his concern for her and for the child. He was probably also agitated by his wife's attending at his mistress's delivery.*
4. *Rukmani hates the tannery, feeling it brings only evil to the villagers. Kunthi prefers the "city" atmosphere the tannery brings. Rukmani prefers rural beauty and traditional values. Kunthi repudiates both.*
5. *Kunthi seems to enjoy male attentions in any form; to her, prostitution is a glamorous and profitable life. For Irawaddy, prostitution is a last resort to get money to feed Kuti.*

6. Kunthi accuses Rukmani of having an affair with Kenny and threatens to tell Nathan. In her rage Rukmani physically attacks Kunthi. In a similar event later, Rukmani attacks Irawaddy, mistaking her in the dark for Kunthi. Both incidents emphasize that the normally compliant Rukmani can be fierce in defense of home and family.
 7. Kunthi, like everyone, has suffered as a result of the drought. All of her beauty is gone. She insists that Rukmani give her rice and threatens that she will tell Nathan of Rukmani's visits with Kenny. Rukmani seems to feel that, having kept the secret so long, Nathan might lose trust in her if she reveals it now.
 8. Nathan takes the rice when Kunthi threatens to reveal that he is the father of her sons. The peace comes from the open truth between Nathan and Rukmani, instead of secrets that enabled Kunthi to gain power over them.
 9. Kunthi is one of the few Indian characters who deliberately seek to harm others for selfish reasons; certainly, she seems villainous to Rukmani, who judges her as evil. On the other hand, her circumstances are certainly limited, and she is at least partly a victim.
3. Remind students that early in the novel one of Rukmani's main concerns is her desire for children, especially sons. Point out that, in light of later events, this desire is somewhat ironic. Have the class complete **Handout 8**.

Suggested Responses:

Irawaddy is responsible, self-sacrificing, and loving, especially to children; she is rejected by her husband and has an albino child as a result of her activities as a prostitute.

Arjun and Thambi are determined and see beyond the patient endurance of their parents; they go far away to Ceylon to work on tea plantations. Rukmani foreshadows that she will never see them again.

Of Murugan we know that Kenny gets him a job as a servant in a town. (Note: We learn more in Part Two.)

Raja, extremely frail after the drought and famine, is killed in an incident at the tannery. Selvam as a child was a little more timid than the others; he is interested in Kenny's work; he is caring and insightful.

Kuti dies of malnutrition as a young child.

4. Ask a volunteer to define the word *conflict*. Lead students to see that conflicts always involve two or more forces competing against each other. Add that conflict is a key aspect of plot in short stories and novels. Have students complete **Handout 9**.

Sample Responses:

Person vs. Self—*Rukmani worries about having more children; Rukmani grieves over her children.*

Person vs. Nature—*Rukmani and her family struggle to survive the great monsoon and the drought.*

Person vs. Person—*Rukmani attacks Kunthi; Rukmani attacks Irawaddy.*

Person vs. Society—*Arjun and Thambi go on strike; Rukmani perceives the tannery as an enemy.*

1. *The two main conflicts in Nectar in a Sieve are person vs. nature and person vs. society, with the second dominating. In the struggle against the weather for food and a decent livelihood, the family can endure. The tannery, with all of its attendant social changes, causes the central ongoing conflict in the novel.*
 2. *With Rukmani and Nathan forced to leave home, the tannery seems to be the victor. Industrialization seems to win over the simple people.*
5. Have a volunteer read aloud the first four paragraphs of chapter 1. Point out that the beginning of the novel assures readers that Rukmani will survive this experience. Ask students to write forecasts of what they expect to occur in Part Two.
- You may want to provide prompts: Will Murugan welcome Rukmani and Nathan? Will he be a wealthy person? How will Puli come into the story? What will happen to Nathan?
6. Have small groups share forecasts. Then compile a summary of students' expectations.

A Portrait of Kunthi

Directions: From the beginning of the novel, Kunthi has been on the edge of the action, usually as an unfriendly presence. Use the following questions to consider the novel's overall depiction of Kunthi.

1. Rukmani introduces Kunthi in chapter 1. From the beginning, what attitude does Kunthi express toward Rukmani? In retrospect, what was the reason for the barrier between Kunthi and Rukmani?
2. In chapter 2, Rukmani assists at the delivery of Kunthi's first son. How does Kunthi respond to Rukmani's presence? In retrospect, what was the reason for this response?
3. In chapter 2, how does Nathan respond when Rukmani is so late returning from the delivery of the baby? How does she excuse his response? In retrospect, what was probably troubling him?
4. Compare and contrast Rukmani's and Kunthi's attitudes toward the tannery. How do their values differ?
5. Reread the opening section of chapter 8. Why does Kunthi become a prostitute? Compare and contrast her prostitution with that of Irawaddy later in the novel.
6. In chapter 11, what accusation does Kunthi make against Rukmani? How does Rukmani react? Does this reaction seem in tune with Rukmani's character? How does this event parallel another similar one later in the novel?
7. In chapter 14 Kunthi comes to see Rukmani. Describe the change in her appearance. What does she want? How does she manage to get her way? Why has Rukmani insisted on keeping this secret from Nathan over all these years?
8. What happens to the rice buried in the secret place in the yard? Why does this occur? Kunthi's actions deprive the family of food they desperately need. Why, then, does Rukmani also feel a new sense of peace?
9. To what extent is Kunthi a villain in this novel? To what extent is she just another victim? What judgments of her character does the novel lead you to make?

Rukmani's Children

Directions: In the chart below, list Rukmani's and Nathan's children from eldest to youngest. Record information about their characters, and state what happens to them.

| Rukmani's children | Characteristics | Experiences |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | | |

Analyzing Conflicts

Directions: Read the following descriptions of the major kinds of conflict in fiction. Then indicate examples of each type in *Nectar in a Sieve*. Finally, answer the questions that follow.

| Conflict | Examples | Examples in <i>Nectar in a Sieve</i> |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Person vs. Self | A person struggles for self-understanding or with guilt. | |
| Person vs. Nature | A person tries to escape a flooding river or to flee a roaring lion. | |
| Person vs. Person | Two people have a fist-fight or vie for power in a corporation. | |
| Person vs. Society | Someone fights for a way to feed the hungry; someone works for honesty in politics. | |

1. Of these four types of conflict, which are the most important in *Nectar in a Sieve*? Explain your answer.

2. By the end of chapter 23, who seems to be winning the conflict? Explain.

Lesson 4

In the City

Objectives

- To understand events in the closing chapters
- To consider Hinduism as part of the novel's setting

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson focuses on Part Two, which includes chapters 24–30. The section begins with Rukmani and Nathan leaving the village and concludes with Rukmani's return. Simple village life has done little to prepare for the realities of a city. Knowing only the name of the street on which they think their son lives, Rukmani and Nathan walk many miles. The first night they sleep in a temple and receive food along with many other poor and homeless people. Their few possessions are stolen. They meet Puli, a young homeless leper, who helps them find Koil Street, but Murugan no longer lives there. They finally find their daughter-in-law, who tells them that her husband has deserted the family. With nowhere to go, Rukmani and Nathan live in the temple. Puli guides them to work in a quarry, where they strive to earn enough money to return to the village. Nathan dies, and Rukmani goes home with Puli.

The themes of *Nectar in a Sieve* are universal, yet the novel is rich in Indian culture. Foods, festivals, the perils and promises of rice farming, and religious symbols are intrinsic to the setting. No detailed knowledge of India's culture and history is necessary to understand the novel. Still, it enhances understanding to know a little about the national background.

Certainly India is among the world's most ancient cultures, with diverse beliefs and practices rooted far back in pre-history. Hinduism, the religion of the majority, embraces diversity rather than shunning it. The very name *Hindu* is a European invention encompassing many different sects. The imperial spirit of eighteenth-century Europe drew both the British and the French to commercial and then military involvement in India. By 1815 India was part of the British empire. Increasing Indian nationalism ultimately led to independence in 1947, as well as partition into the states of India (dominantly Hindu) and Pakistan (dominantly Moslem).

Procedure

1. Have students use Quiz 4 as an evaluation tool or to review chapters 24–30.
2. Ask students to describe ways Markandaya's conclusion is like or unlike conclusions they forecast in Lesson 3.
3. Have students complete **Handout 10**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *They take sleeping mats, some food and utensils, and a little money; they need food for the journey, and they do not want to arrive at their son's home with nothing.*
2. *Inside the large temple are many people, shops, pillars, and figures of the gods and goddesses. Once a day, after offerings are blessed, food is distributed to the poor.*
3. *The people include vendors, worshipers, many poor people, and thieves. When food is at stake, the people can be vicious.*
4. *Puli is the young boy who leads them to the home of Dr. Birla, where Murugan once worked. Later Puli lives and works with them. He appears to have leprosy, which has already severely damaged his hands.*
5. *Dr. Birla is a woman; they have expected a man.*
6. *Das's wife is friendly and generous, much like Rukmani's friends in the village. A happy life in the city seems at least possible.*
7. *Murugan abandoned his family nearly two years earlier. His wife blames his desertion on gambling and seeking prostitutes. No one knows where Murugan is now.*
8. *The tether is money; the less money one has, the shorter the tether, that is, the less one's freedom.*
9. *Chronic ill health, malnutrition, and overly strenuous work lead to his death. Still, Rukmani describes a peaceful and loving end.*

10. Rukmani returns home, bringing Puli with her. The mood is resigned, peaceful, tired, and quietly happy.
4. Point out that Rukmani refers to religion occasionally throughout the novel. Her mother, for example, gives her a religious fertility symbol. She and her mother visit temples begging the gods to help. Ask students to describe ways Rukmani's religion seems like and unlike the religions of people they know. Answers will vary greatly, depending on students' backgrounds and experiences. They may note, for example, that Rukmani's religion does not involve regular church attendance, but it does involve praying at shrines. She does not seem to trouble herself about particular religious beliefs, but she does have a strong sense of right and wrong. She seems to believe in a multiplicity of gods.
5. Have students complete **Handout 11**.

Sample Responses:

1. *Religions with folk origins often synthesize a belief in many gods with a sense of one God. Individual gods and goddesses are associated with specific traits and responsibilities. One God is a divinity encompassing all of the others. Rukmani's special goddess is a shrine to which she is devoted.*
2. *She prays in the hopes that the gods will take an interest, but senses that they have other things to do. Sometimes they care; sometimes they are busy about other things.*
3. *As she gazes in the night at the many carved statues, they almost seem to live and breathe. Earlier, she mentions praying before the images of a god and his consort, or wife.*

4. *Kenny thinks that people should do something to end suffering. Rukmani expresses a religious belief that suffering is a means of spiritual purification, that it should be endured patiently and without complaint.*
 5. *Rukmani's religion is an integral part of her life, not a separate or distinct aspect.*
 6. *Rukmani lives within her caste, the common people. When she mentions marrying above or below oneself, she is speaking of different socioeconomic status within the same caste. When Arjun and Thambi go to work in the tannery, she mentions that they are not in the caste of tanners. Similarly, when Murugan goes to work as a servant, he seems to move to a different class. With modernization, caste seems less influential.*
6. Share historical background about European involvement in India. (See Notes to the Teacher.) Point out that the tannery and Kenny are the main agents of Europe evident in the novel. Ask students to brainstorm ways the European influence seems positive and ways it seems negative. Have students use **Handout 12** to pool results.

Sample Responses:

- Benefits of traditional style—*strong family unit; cultural stability*
- Drawbacks of traditional style—*endemic poverty; complete dependence on weather*
- Benefits of westernization—*economic improvement; higher health standards*
- Drawbacks of westernization—*environmental damage; shattered family unit*

Rukmani and Nathan in the City

Directions: Use the following questions to analyze events and characters in chapters 24–30 of *Nectar in a Sieve*.

1. What items do Rukmani and Nathan take with them when they leave the village? Why?
2. Describe the temple in which they stay. How long do they stay there?
3. What are some characteristics of other people in the temple?
4. Who is Puli? What is wrong with him?
5. What surprises them about the doctor? Why?
6. What do Das and his wife reflect about city life?
7. What do Rukmani and Nathan discover about Murugan?
8. What does Rukmani mean when she compares a human being to a tethered animal?
9. What happens to Nathan? How?
10. What do we learn in the closing chapter? Describe its mood.

Rukmani's Philosophy and Religion

Directions: Rukmani is a Hindu, as are the majority of people in India today. More than a religion, Hinduism is a complex combination of beliefs, philosophy, lifestyle, culture, art, and social structure. Unlike many other religions, it has no formal codified creed, no ecclesiastical organization, and no single form of worship. Instead, it embraces a wide variety of ideas and practices.

1. Rukmani sometimes refers to a divinity as a single God; at other times she mentions multiple gods and goddesses. What is the difference? What does she mean when she refers to her special goddess in the village?
2. In Rukmani's belief, do the gods care about human beings?
3. How does she describe the statues in the temple at the end of chapter 24?
4. Reread the closing paragraphs of chapter 19. How do her views of suffering differ from Kenny's?
5. Would you describe Rukmani as a religious person? Why, or why not?
6. Hinduism teaches that people are separated into several different castes or social classes. Traditionally, one cannot cross from one into another. At the highest level are the Brahmins, the wealthy and educated. Then come the Kshatriyas, responsible for social order. Under them are the Vaisyas, the common people. Still lower are the Sudras, servants responsible to serve others. Lowest of all are the Panchamas, the "untouchables." Within these castes are other sub-castes, social groups based on location, occupation, and other factors. While a sense of caste remains in modern India, modernization, industrialization, and westernization have reduced the rigidity of the caste system in practice. What does *Nectar in Sieve* show about the caste system?

East Meets West

Directions: *Nectar in a Sieve* presents the timeless lifestyle of a village in rural India. It also describes the encroachment of the tannery, obviously under English ownership. Yet another agent of the West is Kenny, the English doctor who is both challenged and frustrated by local conditions. Brainstorm positive and negative aspects of the traditional lifestyle. Then brainstorm ways the Western influence is a benefit to the people and ways it is harmful to them.

Benefits of traditional style

Drawbacks of traditional style

Benefits of westernization

Drawbacks of westernization

Lesson 5

Markandaya's Use of Tools of Fiction

Objectives

- To analyze the novel's plot and structure, point of view, and characterization
- To consider how changes in plot, point of view, character, and setting would alter the novel

Notes to the Teacher

Lessons 1–4 develop many topics basic to this lesson, which invites students to overall analysis of *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novel consists of a lengthy flashback, a reminiscence covering Rukmani's life from girlhood to old age. Rising action is based on both causation and coincidence, with the climax occurring when Rukmani and Nathan are forced off the land. The conclusion seems more relief than happiness; yet, the real conclusion comes not at the end but at the beginning of the novel, bringing the reader full circle. Our first glimpse of Rukmani is also our last, and we see a contented, peaceful, and nostalgic old woman.

Markandaya uses the first-person point of view effectively, staying within a perspective limited by experience and widened by time. How reliable is Rukmani as the narrator? Certainly, she is honest. As always, however, the reader needs to be alert to blind spots, to see beyond the speaker's limits. The narrative voice determines the novel's style. Conversational language relates events as Rukmani remembers them.

Characterization is both direct and indirect, as Rukmani both describes the characters and shows them in action, enabling readers to reach their own conclusions. Of course, Rukmani herself is the main character. Others of continuing importance are Nathan, Kenny, and Irawaddy. It is interesting how little the characters change. Despite losses, they seem to endure and to mature slowly as their lives unfold. This is not a world of dramatic insights or passionate conversions.

Procedure

1. Divide the class into small groups, and give each group one of **Handouts 13–16**. Direct them to complete the exercises and to prepare to report results to the whole class.

2. Have the group that worked on **Handout 13** report to the class.

Suggested Responses:

Part A

Rukmani's marriage, her acquaintance with Kunthi, birth of Irawaddy, consulting with Kenny, birth of sons, building of the tannery, marriage of Irawaddy, the great monsoon, return of Irawaddy, fight with Kunthi, departure of sons, the drought, bribery by Kunthi, death of Raja, Irawaddy's prostitution, death of Kuti, Selvam working with Kenny, birth of Sacrabani, death of Old Granny, losing the land, sojourn in the city, meeting Puli, death of Nathan, return to the village

Part B

The exposition occurs in the opening pages, with Rukmani's family background. Rising action begins with her marriage and climaxes with the news that they must leave the land. Major events in the rising action include the birth of Irawaddy, meeting Kenny, birth of sons, building of tannery, marriage, return of Irawaddy, the great drought, bribery by Kunthi, and Selvam working with Kenny. Falling action includes experiences in the city, meeting Puli, death of Nathan, and return to the village.

3. Point out the novel's structural organization. (See Notes to the Teacher.)
4. Have the group that worked on **Handout 14** report to the class.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Markandaya uses first person, with Rukmani as narrator.*
2. *Examples abound, e.g., near the end of the first chapter when she comments on Kunthi.*
3. *Examples abound, e.g., near the beginning of chapter 2 when she interprets the responses of Nathan.*

4. *Examples abound, e.g., if Irawaddy narrated the description of her own return home, if Kunthi described the meeting with Rukmani on the street or if Nathan's death were described with objective point of view.*
 5. *Possibilities are endless. Encourage creativity.*
 6. *Rukmani's simple, honest perspective provides a fascinating window on the world of Nectar in a Sieve. It evokes a sympathetic response from readers.*
5. Have the group that worked on **Handout 15** report to the class.

Suggested Responses:

Part A

Rukmani—major, static, round

Nathan—major, static, round

Kunthi—minor, static, flat

Irawaddy—major, dynamic, round

Kenny—major, static, flat

Arjun—minor, dynamic, flat

Murugan—minor, dynamic, flat

Puli—minor, dynamic, flat

Part B

Chapter 1 Kali's comments provide indirect characterization to reinforce Rukmani's generalizations about Nathan.

Chapter 6 The lavish wedding provides indirect characterization to emphasize Rukmani's love for Irawaddy.

Chapter 11 The attack shows a fierce determination different from most of Rukmani's direct self-characterization.

Chapter 13-14 Rukmani says that they have given up (direct characterization); she shows their determined struggle to replant and survive (indirect characterization).

Chapter 16 This indirect characterization reinforces Irawaddy's love for children, especially for Kuti.

Chapter 19 Indirect characterization enables the reader to understand Kenny better than Rukmani herself can.

Chapter 20 Indirect characterization convinces the reader of Selvam's intelligence, wisdom, and warmheartedness.

Chapter 29 Indirect characterization reinforces the reader's perception of the love between Rukmani and Nathan.

6. Have the group that worked on **Handout 16** report to the class.

Suggested Responses:

Part A

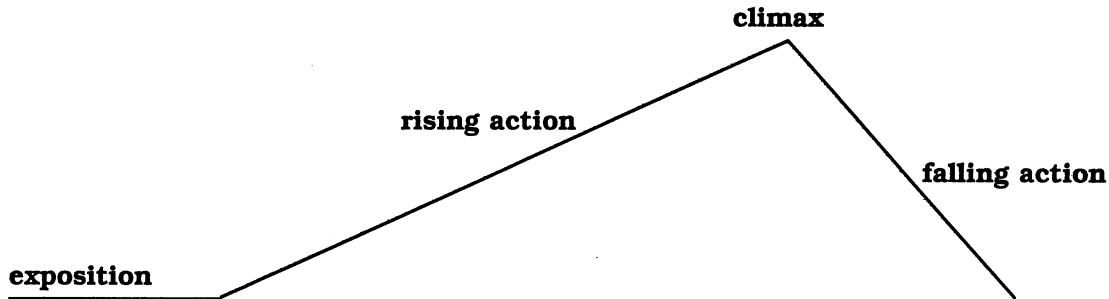
1. India
2. a rural area, based on agriculture, especially rice farming
3. subsistence farming; changes brought in by industrialization; much poverty
4. sometimes beautiful with growing things; sometimes devastated by floods or drought; rural; encroachments by industry
5. dependence on a good monsoon season—not too much rain, not too little
6. ambiguous—probably mid-twentieth century India
7. They wear traditional Indian dress. Women wear saris—long pieces of cloth wrapped several times around the waist and then draped around the torso. Men wear dhotis, cloth wound around the waist, pulled between the legs, and tucked into the waist.
8. rice, dahl (lentils), vegetables, milk curds, dried fish
9. music from instruments such as drums and fiddles; rich cakes; fireworks; bonfires
10. percussion and string music

Part B

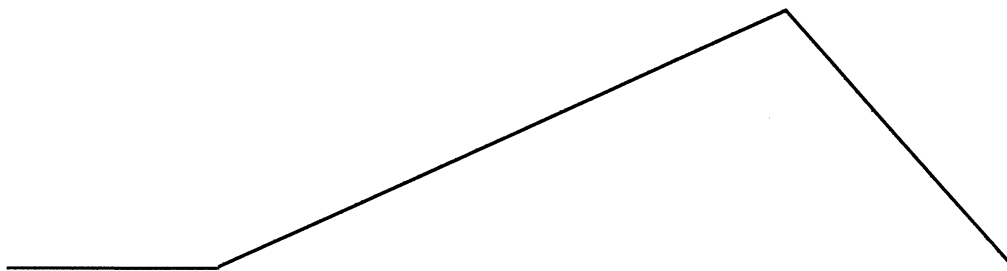
1. everyone joining in; bathing in the river; wedding sari and makeup; arranged marriage; Indian foods
2. The Indian setting includes many universals: music, dancing, fireworks, a bonfire, candy, and drinking.
3. the figures of the deities; the appearance of the priests; the religious offerings
4. There are numerous possibilities, all of which will reveal Markandaya's combinations of universal and local elements.

Part B.

Directions: Plots are often analyzed in terms of exposition, rising action, climax, and falling action. The exposition introduces the situation, often including setting and major characters. Rising action consists of a series of events or steps in the development of the conflict. The climax is the highest point of action, the turning point after which everything is resolution. Falling action resolves loose ends and brings the story to a close. We often use a diagram as a tool to analyze plot.



Refer to part A of this handout. Highlight events that are essential to the development of the story; had they not occurred, everything would have been different. Then use the following diagram to analyze the plot of *Nectar in a Sieve*.



Point of View in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Directions: The term *point of view* refers to the narrator. When the point of view is first person, the speaker is a character in the story; the narrator can see others act and hear them speak, but has access only to his/her own thoughts. One clue to a first-person narrator is the speaker's use of the pronouns "I" and "me." An omniscient narrator speaks from outside the story and has access to all of the characters' thoughts and actions. A limited omniscient narrator speaks from outside the story but has access to only one character's thoughts. Finally, an objective narrator is like a camera, recording actions and words, but having no access to thoughts. Use the following questions to analyze point of view in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

1. Which of the four main types of point of view is used in the novel? Explain your choice.
2. Find an instance when the narrator expresses her own thoughts or motivation.
3. Find an instance when the narrator observes another person and conjectures about that person's thoughts or motivation. Is the narrator's conclusion correct?
4. Find three passages that would be very different if they were narrated by someone else. Why would they have to change?
5. Rewrite one event in the novel from a different point of view.
6. Why is Kamala Markandaya's choice of point of view an effective one for this novel?

Characterization in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Part A.

Directions: Characters are often identified as major (playing large roles) or minor (playing relatively small roles). They are also classified as dynamic (experiencing a significant change) or static (staying basically the same), as well as round (complex) or flat (simple). Between the extremes are the somewhats—the somewhat major, the somewhat dynamic, the somewhat round. In many stories, the major characters are also the ones that are dynamic and round. Is this true in *Nectar in a Sieve*? Use the following chart to classify and analyze characters.

| | Major | Minor | Dynamic | Static | Round | Flat |
|----------|-------|-------|---------|--------|-------|------|
| Rukmani | | | | | | |
| Nathan | | | | | | |
| Kunthi | | | | | | |
| Irawaddy | | | | | | |
| Kenny | | | | | | |
| Arjun | | | | | | |
| Murugan | | | | | | |
| Puli | | | | | | |

Part B.

Directions: Authors use direct and indirect characterization, both singly and in combination. With direct characterization, the narrator makes a direct statement about a character's personality, background, or motivation. With indirect characterization, the narrator describes a character's words or actions, but the reader must infer the character's personality, background, or motivation. Reread the following passages from Nectar in a Sieve, and explain how they exemplify direct and indirect characterization.

Chapter 1

Kali's description of
Nathan before the wedding

Chapter 6

Irawaddy's wedding

Chapter 11

Rukmani's attack on Kunthi

Chapters 13–14

The family at the end of the
drought

Chapter 16

Irawaddy's prostitution

Chapter 19

Kenny, in the closing
paragraphs

Chapter 20

The closing paragraphs

Chapter 29

Death of Nathan

Setting in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Part A.

Directions: A work's setting includes the time and place at which it occurs, as well as other elements such as culture, atmosphere, and mood. Use the following questions to describe the setting of *Nectar in a Sieve*.

1. In what country does the story take place?
2. In what area(s) of the country does it occur?
3. Describe the economy of the area.
4. What does the area look like?
5. Describe the weather patterns.
6. What is the time setting? When do the events occur?
7. How do the people dress?
8. What foods do they eat?
9. What cultural practices characterize their celebrations?
10. What kinds of music do they enjoy?

Part B.

Directions: Sometimes a specific setting is so essential that a change in time or place would alter a work dramatically. In other works, events and characters seem so universal that they could be placed anywhere at any time. Use the following questions to consider the importance of the specific setting in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

1. Reread the description of Irawaddy's wedding in chapter 6. Record details specific to rural India.
2. Reread the description of Deepavali in chapter 10. Which details are specific to rural India? Which are universal?
3. Reread descriptions of the temple in chapter 24. Which details would have to change if the story's setting changed?
4. Select one passage or incident in the novel. Rewrite it, changing its setting. For example, move it to frontier days in America or to a modern city.

Lesson 6

Themes of *Nectar in a Sieve*

Objective

- To formulate and discuss major themes conveyed through the novel

Notes to the Teacher

What does *Nectar in a Sieve* say about life and about human beings? Is the work overly romantic, as some reviewers suggest? Does it speak across cultural differences to say something worth hearing?

One key to the novel's themes is its title, a figure of speech which is presented in context in the epigraph. Work and hope are surely dominant concerns in Rukmani's life, and it is evident that she does not despair. A closer look at the Coleridge poem in its entirety reveals an intriguing contrast; Markandaya uses lines from a poem of despair to herald a novel of hope and endurance.

Readers find that this work speaks eloquently of work and hope, as well as about the capacity of humans to care for one another. Universal literary and historical concerns emerge: tradition vs. change; urban vs. rural; West vs. East; the finality of death; relationships between men and women; harmony of people with nature; parents and children.

Procedure

1. Have students complete **Handout 17**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Nathan to Rukmani in chapter 4, when she has set herself against the tannery; advocates flexibility and adapting to reality; suggests that we cannot successfully fight change*
2. *Rukmani just before describing the great monsoon (chapter 7); suggests that control of nature is an illusion; nature will attack when we least expect it*
3. *Rukmani about the Muslim women in chapter 8; values freedom and close contact with nature*

4. *Rukmani in chapter 14 when the truth is out about Kunthi; means that lies and secrets can destroy peace and security in a family*
 5. *Rukmani in chapter 15, about the tannery officials who come regarding Raja's death; suggests that people can be so far apart in perspective and experience that there is no possibility of communication*
 6. *Kenny to Rukmani in chapter 19; means that people have to demand social change; silent suffering is unlikely to result in outside concern or help*
 7. *Rukmani reflecting about the death of Old Granny (chapter 21); suggests that people are reluctant to help because they fear continual requests for more help; reminder of the inevitability and finality of death*
 8. *Rukmani in chapter 23 about the life of a subsistence farmer; stresses natural cycles and patience; sees life as risky*
2. Tell students that for many readers the title of the novel is a puzzle. Have the class work through **Handout 18**.

Suggested Responses:

Part A.

1. *In Greek mythology nectar is the beverage of the gods on Mount Olympus; in ordinary usage it is a sweet and delicious drink. A sieve is a device that allows particles to stream through it—a pot, e.g., with many holes in its bottom. Efforts to collect nectar in a sieve are futile; one simply loses the precious liquid, perhaps holding on to only a few drops.*
2. *The epigraph, the source of the title, was written by British romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Work, like nectar, is precious, but without hope of success it is useless; if the object of the hope is lost, so is the hope itself. When people have hope and have something to hope for, their work is precious and valuable. If they do not, it is deadly drudgery. The quote probably relates to the novel's major concerns.*

Part B.

1. *the end of winter and the beginning of spring*
 2. *slugs, bees, birds—everything!*
 3. *Winter smiles in anticipation of the coming spring.*
 4. *The speaker alone is idle, not working.*
 5. *Both relate to immortality.*
 6. *The speaker is melancholy, idle, depressed, without hope.*
 7. *Do you want to know what is wrong with me?*
 8. *His work would be meaningless because he has no hope; he has no hope because he can find nothing to hope for.*
 9. *This is a poem with little or no hope for the speaker.*
 10. *work, hope, goals*
 11. *The characters spend practically every moment of their lives engaged in work; they nearly always hang on to at least shreds of hope.*
 12. *Despite the sorrows in the novel, it is hopeful about human nature and about the possibilities of human life.*
 13. *The two themes are antithetical.*
 14. *Perhaps she wanted to emphasize that hope can endure, and people can work to bring their hopes to fruition.*
3. Remind students that themes are a work's implications or statements about human nature, human life, or other universal concerns. Have students complete part A of **Handout 19**. Then conduct a general discussion based on responses. Numerous themes will emerge. Examples include the following: No matter what crises life brings, people can keep hope and go forward. People in various cultures have more similarities than differences. Children should be encouraged to pursue their own dreams.
 4. Have students complete part B of the hand-out.

Suggested Responses:

Romanticism—*glowing descriptions of garden and rice paddy*

Realism—*explanation of the need to shift trade from Old Granny to Biswas*

Naturalism—*the grinding experience of the great drought*

Nectar in a Sieve combines elements of all three. Some reviewers see the book as romantic. It can be argued, however, that while Rukmani's perspective may be somewhat romantic, Markandaya's is not.

Homespun Philosophies

Directions: Occasionally characters in *Nectar in a Sieve* state their general beliefs about life, ideas that result from thought and experience. Read the following quotations. For each, identify the speaker, the occasion, and the meaning. Then give a personal response.

1. "There is no going back. Bend like the grass, that you do not break."
2. "Nature is like a wild animal that you have trained to work for you. So long as you are vigilant and walk warily with thought and care, so long will it give you its aid; but look away for an instant, be heedless or forgetful, and it has you by the throat."
3. "I felt desperately sorry for them, deprived of the ordinary pleasures of knowing warm sun and cool breeze upon their flesh, of walking out light and free, or of mixing with men and working beside them."
4. "It seemed to me that a new peace came to us then, freed at last from the necessity for lies and concealment and deceit, with the fear of betrayal lifted from us, with the power we ourselves had given her wrested finally from Kunthi."
5. "There was no sense in agreeing or disagreeing, the gulf between us was too wide; it was no use at all flinging our words at each other across that gaping chasm."
6. "You must cry out if you want help. It is no use whatsoever to suffer in silence. Who will succour the drowning man if he does not clamour for his life?"
7. "Once a human being is dead there are people enough to provide the last decencies; perhaps it is so because only then can there be no question of further or recurring assistance being sought. Death after all is final."
8. "To those who live by the land there must always come times of hardship, of fear, and of hunger, even as there are years of plenty. This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know: that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve . . . In our lives there is no margin for misfortune."

Examining the Title: "Nectar in a Sieve"

Part A.

Directions: Use the following steps to consider the significance of the title.

1. First examine the title itself.

What is nectar?

What is a sieve?

What happens if someone tries to collect nectar in a sieve?

2. Second, reread the epigraph at the beginning of the novel.

How does the epigraph relate to the title?

Who was Coleridge?

Explain the metaphor in the first line.

What does the second line mean?

How would you interpret the two lines as a unit of meaning?

Why would an author include an epigraph?

Part B.

Directions: The epigraph comes from the following poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Read it carefully, and answer the questions.

Work Without Hope

Lines Composed 21st February 1825

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—
And Winter slumbering in the open air,
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!
And I the while, the sole unbusy thing,
Nor honey make, nor pair nor build, nor sing.

Yet well I ken the banks where amaranths blow,
Have traced the fount whence streams of nectar flow.
Bloom, O ye amaranths! bloom for whom ye may,
For me ye bloom not! Glide, rich streams, away!
With lips unbrightened, wreathless brow, I stroll:
And would you learn the spells that drowse my soul?
Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live.

1. In stanza 1, what is the season of the year?
2. What parts of nature are at work?
3. Explain the personification in lines 3–4.
4. How does the speaker contrast with the nature he observes?
5. What do amaranths and nectar have in common?
6. Describe the speaker's state of mind.
7. Paraphrase the question in line 12.
8. Explain the answer in lines 13–14.
9. Is this a poem of hope? Explain your answer.
10. An epigraph usually suggests topics and themes central to the work. What topics dominate the epigraph to *Nectar in a Sieve*?
11. How important are these topics in the novel as a whole?
12. Is the novel hopeful? Explain.
13. How does the novel's theme relate to the poem's theme?
14. Suggest reasons for Markandaya's choice of title.

Themes in *Nectar in a Sieve*

Part A.

Directions: *Nectar in a Sieve*, like most novels and plays, has more than one theme. What does the novel suggest about the following topics?

Hope and despair

People and nature

Urban vs. rural life

Tradition and change

Diverse cultures

Love and marriage

Parents and children

Life and death

Part B.

Directions: Critics often classify literature as romantic, realistic, or naturalistic in overall perspective. Romantic works tend to emphasize emotion, to revel in nature, and to glorify the common person; they also tend to be idealistic. Realistic works emphasize things as they are, often with a pessimistic or negative emphasis. Naturalism carries realism to an extreme, emphasizing the harsh impersonality of nature and life; life is a matter of survival of the fittest. Find examples of each in *Nectar in a Sieve*.

Romanticism

Realism

Naturalism

What is the work's overall view of human life?

Quiz 1—Chapters 1-6

- ____ 1. The opening paragraphs make it clear that the narrator is
 - a. a child
 - b. a young woman
 - c. a middle-aged woman
 - d. an old woman
- ____ 2. After the opening paragraphs, the narrator's story
 - a. goes back into the past
 - b. continues on to the future
 - c. goes back and forth between past and present
 - d. confuses past and present
- ____ 3. Puli is handicapped by
 - a. crippled legs
 - b. blindness
 - c. damaged hands
 - d. low intelligence
- ____ 4. The narrator says that her parents
 - a. became increasingly wealthy
 - b. became increasingly poor
 - c. were economically stable
 - d. never had anything at all
- ____ 5. The narrator marries at the age of
 - a. twelve
 - b. fourteen
 - c. sixteen
 - d. eighteen
- ____ 6. Nathan is
 - a. a goldsmith
 - b. a fisherman
 - c. a tenant farmer
 - d. a shopkeeper
- ____ 7. Which of the following is not one of the narrator's three neighbors?
 - a. Kali
 - b. Janaki
 - c. Irawaddy
 - d. Kunthi
- ____ 8. The narrator's name is
 - a. Shanta
 - b. Rukmani
 - c. Irawaddy
 - d. Granny
- ____ 9. Kunthi's attitude toward the narrator appears to be
 - a. disdain
 - b. affection
 - c. respect
 - d. dislike
- ____ 10. The narrator has an interest in
 - a. gardening
 - b. writing
 - c. children
 - d. all of these
- ____ 11. What does the narrator find among the pumpkin plants?
 - a. a bunny
 - b. a baby
 - c. a poisonous spider
 - d. a snake
- ____ 12. The narrator names her daughter after
 - a. a river
 - b. a bird
 - c. a goddess
 - d. a relative
- ____ 13. Kenny is
 - a. an Indian doctor
 - b. a white doctor
 - c. a family servant
 - d. a priest
- ____ 14. For what future event does the narrator carefully set aside money?
 - a. her daughter's wedding
 - b. her oldest son's wedding
 - c. her own old age
 - d. her husband's funeral
- ____ 15. What event brings lasting change to the village?
 - a. the building of the tannery
 - b. the building of the Muslim temple
 - c. the construction of the bank
 - d. the arrival of Christian missionaries
- ____ 16. In chapter 6 there is a big celebration
 - a. in honor of the gods
 - b. in gratitude for the harvest
 - c. about the birth of the narrator's eighth child
 - d. in honor of the marriage of the narrator's daughter

Quiz 2—Chapters 7–13

- ____ 1. The celebration of Rukmani's daughter's marriage is followed by the disaster of a terrible
a. earthquake
b. volcano eruption
c. fire at the factory
d. monsoon
- ____ 2. Kunthi seems to be involved in
a. stealing
b. arranging marriages
c. prostitution
d. politics
- ____ 3. What is Rukmani's attitude toward the Muslim women?
a. envy
b. pity
c. hostility
d. admiration
- ____ 4. Irawaddy's husband brings her back to her parents because
a. she has been unfaithful
b. she has had no children
c. she misses her parents too much
d. he prefers another woman
- ____ 5. Deepavali is
a. a beautiful mountain area
b. a temple
c. a festival
d. a cemetery
- ____ 6. To whom does Rukmani turn for help for her daughter?
a. Nathan
b. Kunthi
c. the owner of the tannery
d. Kenny
- ____ 7. Who attacks Kunthi?
a. Nathan
b. Kenny
c. Rukmani
d. a worker at the tannery
- ____ 8. Who brings Irawaddy new happiness?
a. Kenny
b. Granny
c. Kuti
d. Kali
- ____ 9. Arjun and Thambi get in trouble for
a. supporting a strike at the tannery
b. joining the Muslim religion
c. starting a gambling club
d. poisoning the water
- ____ 10. Rukmani's two oldest sons decide to go to work
a. in a hospital in the city
b. on a sugar plantation in Barbados
c. on a construction crew in the United States
d. on tea plantations in Ceylon
- ____ 11. Rukmani's third son goes to work
a. in the tannery
b. as a servant
c. as a tenant farmer
d. in a market stall
- ____ 12. Toward Kenny Rukmani feels
a. admiration and understanding
b. trust, but only partial understanding
c. love and desire
d. affection, but uneasy distrust
- ____ 13. A seemingly rich harvest is ruined by
a. too much rain
b. a long and terrible dry season
c. a chemical leak from the factory
d. a terrible insect infestation
- ____ 14. Sivaji comes to
a. collect the dues for the land
b. bring news about Rukmani's sons
c. evict Rukmani and Nathan from the farm
d. provide food and clothing for the needy family
- ____ 15. Which of the following is not sold to save the land?
a. Kuti
b. Rukmani's saris
c. the bullocks
d. Rukmani's sons' shirts

Quiz 3—Chapters 14–23

- ____ 1. Rukmani hides a secret hoard of
a. dried fish
b. rice
c. jewels
d. books
- ____ 2. Who threatens to reveal Rukmani's secret to Nathan?
a. Kenny
b. Irawaddy
c. Kali
d. Kunthi
- ____ 3. Who stole the hidden rice?
a. Kunthi
b. Irawaddy
c. Nathan
d. Kuti
- ____ 4. Nathan admits that he:
a. fathered Kunthi's sons
b. was married once before
c. was once in prison
d. no longer loves Rukmani
- ____ 5. What happens to Raja?
a. He commits suicide.
b. He is killed.
c. He goes to work in Ceylon with his brothers.
d. He becomes a farmer like his father.
- ____ 6. Officials from the tannery come to visit because they are worried about:
a. Rukmani's political views
b. possibilities of contamination of the land
c. possible claims for financial compensation
d. the family's well-being
- ____ 7. In the darkness, Rukmani attacks
a. Nathan
b. Irawaddy
c. Kunthi
d. the tannery guards
- ____ 8. To feed Kuti, Irawaddy earns money through
a. working at the tannery
b. working at neighbors' tenant farms
c. helping Granny
d. prostitution
- ____ 9. What happens to Kuti?
a. He dies of starvation and malnutrition.
b. He dies of smallpox brought in by tannery workers.
c. He dies from eating contaminated meat.
d. He is sold into slavery.
- ____ 10. Kenny says that his wife
a. has died
b. is coming to join him
c. wishes him to return home permanently
d. has left him
- ____ 11. Selvam wants to
a. work with Kenny on a new hospital
b. work with his father on the rice farm
c. join his brothers in Ceylon
d. take advantage of opportunities in the tannery
- ____ 12. Irawaddy's child is
a. born dead
b. hideously deformed
c. severely retarded
d. albino
- ____ 13. How long does it take for the hospital to be finished?
a. two years
b. five years
c. seven years
d. twenty years

- ____ 14. Old Granny dies of
- a mysterious illness
 - starvation
 - dehydration
 - injuries she received in an attack by wild dogs
- ____ 15. Irawaddy tells Sacrabani that his father is
- unknown
 - dead
 - in prison
 - gone for a while
- ____ 16. Kenny says that Nathan's illness is caused by
- malnutrition
 - old age
 - chronic infections
 - overwork
- ____ 17. The owner of Nathan's farm decides to:
- farm the land himself
 - give the land to Nathan
 - sell the land to the tannery
 - open a chemical factory on the land
- ____ 18. Nathan and Rukmani decide to go to
- live in town with Murugan
 - live with Kenny
 - live on another farm far from the tannery
 - live in the old home of Rukmani's family

Quiz 4—Chapters 24–30

- ____ 1. How much money do Nathan and Rukmani have when they leave?
 - a. none
 - b. two rupees
 - c. six rupees
 - d. sixteen rupees
- ____ 2. Nathan and Rukmani look for
 - a. Koil Street
 - b. Kali Street
 - c. English Street
 - d. Ashmani Street
- ____ 3. Rukmani and Nathan take shelter the first night in
 - a. a bus station
 - b. a cave
 - c. a temple
 - d. their son's home
- ____ 4. Their possessions are
 - a. guarded by a small boy
 - b. stolen
 - c. burned in an accidental fire
 - d. impounded by the police
- ____ 5. When Rukmani and Nathan decide to buy some pancakes, they discover
 - a. no food is available
 - b. they are no longer hungry
 - c. their money has been stolen
 - d. the pancakes are free
- ____ 6. Who guides them to Dr. Birla's house?
 - a. no one
 - b. Puli
 - c. Kuti
 - d. a police officer
- ____ 7. Rukmani and Nathan are surprised to find that the doctor is
 - a. a woman
 - b. a very old man
 - c. crippled
 - d. no longer in the city
- ____ 8. Das's wife treats Rukmani and Nathan
 - a. coldly
 - b. cruelly
 - c. as if they are beneath her
 - d. in a friendly way
- ____ 9. At the Collector's house they find
 - a. their son and his family
 - b. their son's family, but not him
 - c. their son, but not his family
 - d. neither their son nor his family
- ____ 10. Rukmani hopes that she can make some money
 - a. as a servant
 - b. working in a food stall
 - c. as a governess
 - d. reading and writing letters
- ____ 11. Puli suggests that Rukmani and Nathan work in
 - a. a mill
 - b. a trash yard
 - c. a quarry
 - d. a hospital
- ____ 12. Rukmani and Nathan long to
 - a. return home to their village
 - b. visit their sons in Ceylon
 - c. settle in the city
 - d. die
- ____ 13. What does Rukmani find at the side of the road?
 - a. Puli, injured by a cart
 - b. a basket of fruit and vegetables
 - c. Nathan, very sick
 - d. her lost bundles
- ____ 14. Nathan says that he
 - a. will be well soon
 - b. prefers not to leave the city
 - c. has never loved Rukmani
 - d. will live on in his children
- ____ 15. To get Puli to come with her, Rukmani promises him
 - a. health
 - b. money
 - c. a job
 - d. a happy home
- ____ 16. At the end of the novel, Rukmani has returned to
 - a. Nathan
 - b. Selvam and Irawaddy
 - c. her sisters
 - d. the temple

Quiz Answer Key

Quiz 1

1. d
2. a
3. c
4. b
5. a
6. c
7. c
8. b
9. d
10. d
11. d
12. a
13. b
14. a
15. a
16. d

Quiz 2

1. d
2. c
3. b
4. b
5. c
6. d
7. c
8. c
9. c
10. d
11. b
12. b
13. b
14. a
15. a

Quiz 3

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. b
6. c
7. b
8. d
9. a
10. d
11. a
12. d
13. c
14. b
15. d
16. a
17. c
18. a

Quiz 4

1. d
2. a
3. c
4. b
5. c
6. b
7. a
8. d
9. b
10. d
11. c
12. a
13. c
14. d
15. a
16. b

Culminating Activities

Research

1. Research and report on rice farming as it is carried on in the world today.
2. Research and report about the life and work of Mohandas Gandhi.
3. Research and report about the life and work of Indira Gandhi.
4. Research and report about the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore.
5. Research and report about life in India today.

Reading

6. Read Kamala Markandaya's *A Handful of Rice*, and compare/contrast it with *Nectar in a Sieve*.
7. Read Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth*; compare/contrast Olan and Rukmani.
8. Read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*; compare the Joad family to Rukmani's and Nathan's family.

Imaginative Writing

9. Write a sequel to *Nectar in a Sieve*, focusing on Arjun and Thambi in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
10. Rewrite a section of the novel from the point of view of Kenny or Nathan.
11. Write a sequel, portraying the life of Selvam or Sacrabani.
12. Write an original story dealing with the same themes in a different setting.

Critical Writing

13. Analyze Markandaya's portrayal of the roles of women.
14. Demonstrate that the novel is romantic, realistic, or naturalistic in perspective.
15. Analyze Rukmani's motivation.
16. Discuss the significance of the title.
17. Discuss the novel's treatment of tradition and economic advancement.

The Woman Warrior

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* is not fiction but autobiography. In 1976 it received the National Book Critics Circle Award as the year's best work of nonfiction. Readers then and now have found it fascinating and troubling. Kingston weaves family stories, Chinese legends and myths, personal memories, imaginative conjectures, and thoughtful reflections to explore her experience of growing up Chinese-American.

Many issues surfaced in *Nectar in a Sieve* are also evident here, among them roles of women, the meaning of family, cultural change, and the value of tradition. Still, the works differ radically in tone. In *The Woman Warrior* we find not serene endurance, but angry frustration and a fierce struggle for identity.

Kingston tells of growing up the daughter of Chinese laundry workers in California, surrounded by traditions transplanted from China and desiring to be American. She shows how Chinese legends of the powerful warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan, contrast with the low regard traditionally given to females. She incorporates vignettes about relatives both in China and in the "Gold Mountain" of America. The result is a powerful, complex, and beautifully crafted story.

Maxine Hong Kingston was born in 1940 in California. While growing up, she worked in her parents' laundry; during the day she attended American school, at night Chinese school. After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley, she taught high school English and mathematics in California and in Hawaii. *The Woman Warrior* was her first book. Another work, *China Men*, complements it by telling the other side of the immigrants' story.

Lesson 1

No Name Woman

Objectives

- To discuss the literary forms of fiction, biography, and autobiography
- To analyze Kingston's use of the story of No Name Woman

Notes to the Teacher

The genre of autobiography has enjoyed renewed attention in recent decades. Critics note its special challenge, the very real difficulty involved in presenting the self one can almost never see in action and in selecting details to convey the truth that matters. Traditional American autobiographies, beginning with Ben Franklin, describe the lives of people pulling themselves up by the bootstraps to rise from poverty to wealth and influence. Recent literary autobiographies tend to stress cultural connections over individual accomplishments.

"No Name Woman," the opening chapter of *The Woman Warrior*, can stand on its own as a short piece of nonfiction and actually did so in an early version. Kingston relates her mother's story of an aunt in China who delivered an illegitimate child and then killed both herself and the baby, a story clearly intended as a warning about the dangers of sex. The author begins with the story itself, then embroiders it with imaginative conjectures about the unknown aunt.

The opening chapter surfaces issues that recur throughout *The Woman Warrior*, among them the status of women, the immigrant experience, belonging to family and community, storytelling, secrecy, cultural differences, and gender roles.

Procedure

1. Have students examine the cover of *The Woman Warrior* and interpret the subtitle, "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts." Lead them to connect the word *memoirs* with the word *memories*. Point out that the title indicates that the work may be nonfiction rather than fiction. Ask students to brainstorm titles of biographies and autobiographies they have read. Examples may include

such works as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, and *The Miracle Worker*.

2. Have students complete **Handout 1**.

Suggested Responses:

1. A work of fiction is a story a writer creates from imagination. Unlike a lie, a fiction is not intended to deceive. Often it is intended to entertain. Good fiction conveys the truth about people and life, but it does not rely primarily on facts.
2. A biography is a story of someone's life. Authors might be motivated by curiosity or admiration.
3. An autobiography is a biography one writes about one's own life. Authors might want to boast about their accomplishments, explain their actions, or reveal a specific lifestyle in action.
4. They all use the tools of narration: plot, character, setting, point of view, and theme.
7. They might omit humiliating or shameful events, people who had no lasting impact, or details unlikely to interest readers.
8. The autobiographer has to pick and choose details and arrange them effectively to create a coherent whole; the novelist often bases characters and events on real people and events.
9. It would be "against the rules" to deliberately identify lies as facts.
10. Truth and fact are not synonymous. Fiction tells the truth through imagination; biography and autobiography tell it by using facts.

3. Have the class read "No Name Woman" aloud. Allow a few minutes for volunteers to surface responses and insights.
4. Have students complete **Handout 2**.

Suggested Responses:

1. Her mother admonished her not to tell anyone the story, but the author tells the whole world by publishing it.

2. *An aunt in China was pregnant, and it was obvious that her husband could not have been the father. The villagers tore the family's home and farm apart. The aunt drowned herself and the baby in the well.*
 3. *The story is intended to warn against sexual activity.*
 4. *She tries to fill in the gaps by imagining "perhaps" scenarios.*
 5. *Kingston wants to describe growing up a Chinese-American girl.*
 6. *Major themes might include gender relationships, culture clashes, mother-daughter communication, storytelling, and belonging.*
 7. *No Name Woman is one of the ghosts of her girlhood, a ghost that still "haunts" her.*
 8. *Both parents came from China; they maintained Chinese traditions; the author is imaginative and creative; she is also ambivalent about her background; as a child she seems to have been shy.*
5. Point out that most families have family stories and anecdotes that are passed through the generations for various reasons. The story of No Name Woman was clearly intended as a warning. Other stories might be intended to amuse, to amaze, or to excite admiration.
 6. Have small groups complete part A of **Hand-out 3**.

Sample Responses:

1. *To show negative effects of abandoning one's family*
2. *To warn against abusing alcohol or other harmful substances*
3. *To encourage ambition, family pride, and great accomplishments*
7. Have students work individually on part B of the handout. Then have volunteers share responses with the class. Point out that Kingston's technique in chapter 1 can inspire other writers to imitation.

Fact, Fiction, and Truth

Directions: Use the following questions to analyze similarities and differences among fiction, biography, and autobiography.

1. In studying literature, what do we mean by the term *fiction*? How is a fiction different from a lie? Give an example of a work of fiction you have read.
2. What is a biography? What reasons might a person have for writing a biography? Give an example of a biography you know.
3. What is an autobiography? Why might a person write an autobiography? Give an example of an autobiography you know.
4. What do fiction, biography, and autobiography have in common?
5. Of the three, which do you prefer to read? Why?
6. Suppose that you were going to write your autobiography. List three persons or events you would have to include to tell the story of who you are. Why is each so important?
7. Autobiographers also have to decide what not to include. What reasons might they have for omitting some people and events?
8. In what sense is it true that every autobiography is partially fiction? that every fiction is partially autobiography?
9. Is anything “against the rules” in autobiography?
10. Explain the following statement: Fiction, biography, and autobiography can all tell the truth. They just tell the truth in different ways.

No Name Woman

Directions: Maxine Hong Kingston begins *The Woman Warrior* with a story her mother told her when she was a young adolescent. Use the following questions to analyze the opening chapter.

1. What irony do you see in the opening sentence?
2. Summarize the story of No Name Woman.
3. What was the mother's purpose in telling the story?
4. How does Kingston respond imaginatively to the story of No Name Woman?
5. What seems to be the purpose of this autobiography?
6. What issues seem to surface as major themes?
7. Relate the subtitle, "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts," to this chapter.
8. What have you learned about Kingston's family background, character, and personality?

Family Stories

Part A.

Directions: Read the following examples of family stories and indicate what the purposes seem to be in telling them.

1. "You never met your Uncle Tim, my oldest brother. He quit school when he was sixteen and ran away from home. Your grandmother never got over that. We didn't hear from him for five years, except for one card postmarked Nome, Alaska, but with no return address. It took him ten more years to come back to visit. By then Grandma and Grandpa were both dead, and none of us cared if we ever saw him again, after all of the grief he caused."

2. "Your grandmother had a sister named Stella. You never met her, and I think I only saw her once or twice. Your grandmother didn't want her around. Stella was a drunk, and she lived on the street more than anywhere else. She died years ago."

3. "This is a picture of your great-grandfather. When he was a boy, everyone said he would never amount to much—not enough backbone and determination, not enough intelligence. Well, he went through college, even got a master's degree, then started his own business and became an inventor. He was a millionaire before he was forty! And he was a happy man, too, with a big family and many, many friends."

Part B.

Directions: Record a story that you have been told about someone in your family, preferably someone whom you have never actually met. You may want to do some family research by asking questions about aunts, uncles, and other family figures.

Now imitate Maxine Hong Kingston and use your imagination. Conjecture about that story. Write a sentence or two beginning with each of the following words or phrases.

Maybe. . .

Or perhaps. . .

I wonder if. . .

Someone else said. . .

Is it possible that. . .

In that situation I would probably have. . .

Lesson 2

Fa Mu Lan

Objectives

- To discuss hidden meanings of legends, myths, and fairy tales
- To analyze Kingston's use of the legend of the woman warrior

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapter 2 of *The Woman Warrior*, which is dominated by the legend of Fa Mu Lan, the warrior woman. Unlike No Name Woman, unlike the foot-bound ladies of old China, Fa Mu Lan is formidable and invincible, at least as well trained and courageous as any male hero. Like the first chapter, this one centers on a story, connects the story to the narrator's family and life, and relates it to the experience of growing up a Chinese-American woman. Kingston closes the chapter by relating Fa Mu Lan's mission to obtain vengeance with her own mission to report the truth.

Like most legends and myths, the story of Fa Mu Lan conveys strong cultural beliefs and exerts powerful imaginative appeal. Students may recognize similarities to their own responses to stories shared at home and at school. This connection can facilitate the class's understanding of what often seems a very difficult section of *The Woman Warrior*.

Procedure

1. Begin by having students use Quiz 1 as an evaluation tool or as a way to review comprehension of chapters 1–2.
2. Point out that most of chapter 2 deals with the legend or myth of a warrior woman named Fa Mu Lan, another story the narrator heard from her mother. Like most such stories, it both entertains and conveys cultural ideals. Ask students to brainstorm stories that were told or read to them when they were children. Examples: *The Giving Tree*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the story of Pinocchio, the tooth fairy, George Washington and the ill-fated cherry tree, Johnny Appleseed, *The Little Engine That Could*, Davy Crockett.

3. Have students complete **Handout 4** and share responses.

Suggested Responses:

1. *In practice these forms, all highly imaginative, tend to overlap. Legends are often based on historical people and events, e.g., George Washington's "I cannot tell a lie." Myths tend to have deep cultural and religious roots and often explain phenomena, e.g., the story of Pandora's box. Fairy tales often involve magic and romance, e.g., "Sleeping Beauty." Parables intend to teach a lesson through metaphor, e.g., "The Ugly Duckling." Fables present animal characters to convey morals, e.g., the famous race between the tortoise and the hare.*
- 2–8. *Answers will be highly subjective and thus will vary greatly. If necessary provide additional prompts such as the Christmas story, Superman, Bambi, ghost stories, and Pocahontas.*
4. Point out that the stories we hear as children often reflect familial and cultural traditions, beliefs, and ideals. This is true of Kingston's story of Fa Mu Lan.
5. Work through **Handout 5** with the class.

Suggested Responses:

1. *She uses first person, identifying herself with Fa Mu Lan and making herself part of the action. Third person would have distanced her from the legend.*
2. *Typically a hero stands head and shoulders above everyone else and uses might in pursuit of right. The hero often experiences a period of initiation and testing prior to engaging in adventures to rescue others from danger and destruction. Heroes are brave, self-sacrificing, skillful, and strong. Fa Mu Lan fits the pattern well, a female hero. Note the contrast with the legendary Joan of Arc, as well as Fa Mu Lan's acceptance of a domestic role after accomplishing her mission.*

3. *She spends fifteen years training under the direction of the mysterious old man and woman, learning discipline, endurance, fighting techniques, and survival skills.*
4. *This symbolic section suggests, first, that all parents engrave their grievances on their children; children become public proclamations of injustices done their families. Kingston rereads "vengeance" as "telling the story," which is what she is doing in this book.*
5. *Their relationship is contradictory, paradoxical, and confusing. Kingston is torn by contrasting views. Is it bad or good to be a girl? Are women helpless or powerful? Is sex bad or good? How does one reconcile bound feet with the ideal of women who are warriors?*
6. *They are businessmen who disregard poor people's lives and display racial bigotry.*
7. *The Communists have joined the ranks of the enemy, persecuting the very people they purported to help, killing and exploiting Kingston's relatives in China.*
8. *She plans to "report," to use words to show injustice. She has found a creative and original restatement of the old adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword."*

Legends, Myths, and Other Stories

Directions: Like Maxine Hong Kingston's mother, many parents and teachers tell or read stories to entertain and teach children. Consider the role such stories have played in your life.

1. Use the dictionary and your own experience to define the following terms and list examples.

Legend

Myth

Fairy tale

Parable

Fable

2. List some stories that fascinated you when you were a child and perhaps still grip your imagination today.
3. Select one of these stories and summarize its events and characters.
4. What are some reasons why you liked the story so much?
5. How did you sometimes imagine yourself into the story?
6. How many other people do you think know this story? Why?
7. Why did someone—parent, grandparent, teacher, television programmer—decide to tell you the story?
8. What hidden messages does the story convey?

Fa Mu Lan—The Woman Warrior

Directions: Use the following questions to analyze Kingston's use of the legend of the Chinese woman warrior.

1. What point of view does Kingston use? Why? How would the story differ if she had used third person to narrate the legend?
2. What is a hero? What are some typical patterns of stories of heroes? How well does Fa Mu Lan fit the pattern?
3. List the steps in her development from ordinary child to heroic warrior. How long does the process take?
4. How do you interpret the section in which her parents engrave their grievances in the flesh of her back? How does Kingston interpret it at the end of the chapter?
5. The stories in chapters 1 and 2 focus on what it means to be a Chinese woman. How do the stories relate to one another? How do they seem to have affected Kingston?
6. Who are the business-suited enemies she mentions?
7. What is the meaning of her comments on politics in China?
8. Fa Mu Lan had enemies in those who harmed her family. Who are Kingston's enemies? What is her battle plan?

Lesson 3

The Sitting Ghost

Objectives

- To analyze Kingston's portrait of her mother
- To recognize the autobiography's potential for stage adaptation

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapter 3, which begins with the story of Kingston's mother's attendance at medical school in China. As with the first two chapters, Kingston clearly bases the chapter on her mother's stories. Brave Orchid emerges as smart, hardworking, brave, independent, practical, and successful. After her prestige and success in China, the American reality must have been a great disappointment.

The story of the encounter with the Sitting Ghost seems to be an example of the mother's favorite kind of story, the ghost story. Besides offering her listeners the kind of chilling entertainment we might associate with horror movies and mysteries, it emphasizes her bravery, her power to battle evil spirits and win. In her own way, she is like Fa Mu Lan. In phrasing reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, Kingston comments on the bliss of having opportunities for privacy and freedom from the demands of domesticity.

The tension between the images of No Name Woman and Fa Mu Lan escalates with the contrast between the mother's powerful independence and stories about female inferiority. Girls were sold in the market as slaves; female babies were given away; girls were routinely smothered at birth. A second tension also intensifies, that between the parents' Chinese roots and their children's American reality. The Chinese immigrants coped with their new world by viewing everyone except themselves and the Japanese as ghosts. The work's subtitle gains new significance; Kingston's girlhood was indeed filled with ghosts.

Procedure

1. Have students use Quiz 2 as an evaluation tool or to review chapter 3.
2. Point out that Kingston again interweaves fact and fantasy in telling a Chinese woman's story. Here she focuses on her mother, who has been a key figure since the book's opening sentence. Have students complete **Hand-out 6**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Various conjectures are possible. The diploma seems special and precious, not something to be displayed constantly. It may also be a reminder of loss in status. It becomes clear later in the book that differing educational practices and an inability to master English kept the mother from being a doctor in America.*
2. *This powerful metaphor makes China seem ugly, vaguely threatening, alien, ancient, and exotic.*
3. *The three scrolls provide factual evidence of the mother's past. The first, the biggest, is her diploma, with her serious-faced photograph. The second, a photograph of the graduating class, places her in a social context, where she can be compared to other women. The third seems to be a certificate from the Cantonese Department of Health.*
4. *After her first two children died, she decided to use the money her husband sent to go to school.*
5. *There was probably something strange about the room, unexplained noises and experiences. The facts were embellished by imagination, deliberate story-telling, and playfulness. Perhaps the mother wanted to impress or titillate the others, as well as her own children to whom she told the story later.*
6. *In China she had money, prestige, power, and independence; in America she has been poor and over-worked, totally enmeshed in family.*

7. *It was a busy place, with vendors for everything, including girls being sold by their families and by slave merchants.*
 8. *She was skilled at a variety of treatments, and she avoided treating anyone who was dying.*
 9. *Kingston was fascinated and repelled by stories of medical aberrations, murdered babies, the ape-man, the village mad-woman, and the awful meal of monkey brains.*
 10. *These strange details accentuate the contrast between China and America. China seems very alien.*
 11. *The mother here seems ordinary and "real" in contrast to the mythological dimensions given her elsewhere in the chapter.*
 12. *A shaman is a priest with magical abilities to heal. The title can be read as irony or as praise.*
3. Point out that the last part of the chapter describes a recent conversation between mother and daughter. It can easily be visualized as part of a stage or screen play. Have small groups complete **Handout 7**. Before reviewing the handout, have volunteers present dramatizations or dramatic readings.

Suggested Responses:

 1. *a small bedroom in near darkness; a twin bed, with a woman tossing and turning; a chair; an unlit lamp*
 2. *middle-aged, with greying hair; very thin; Chinese; in night clothes*
 3. *a very old Chinese woman, wrinkled*
 4. *very little, except shifting positions and turning the lamp off or on*
 6. *similar to opening scene*
 7. *Without Kingston's very serious reflections, more humor is apparent, e.g., in the exchange about LSD.*
 4. Have students complete **Handout 8**. When they have had sufficient time to complete the exercise, invite volunteers to share responses with the class.

Brave Orchid's Story

Directions: Use the following questions to analyze the blend of fact, memory, and imagination in "Shaman."

1. The mother displays her medical diploma only rarely. What does this show about her? Why is she not a doctor in America?
2. Interpret the metaphor comparing China to a bat. What does it say about Kingston's attitude toward China?
3. What important evidence do the three scrolls provide?
The first scroll
The second scroll
The third scroll
4. How was the mother able to attend medical school in China?
5. What facts are probably at the heart of the story about the Sitting Ghost? How did the facts get embellished?
6. The mother says that she lost a lot when she came to America. What does she mean?
7. Describe the market at Canton.
8. How did the mother maintain her spectacular reputation as a doctor?
9. Besides the story of the Sitting Ghost, what other horror stories has the mother told about her life in China? How have they affected Kingston?
10. Why did Kingston include the details about food?
11. The chapter ends in the present. How does the closing image of the mother reflect a return to facts?
12. Why did Kingston entitle this chapter "Shaman"?

From Page to Stage

Directions: Prepare a dramatization of the last section of "Shaman," in which Kingston describes a recent visit home.

1. Describe the stage as the curtain opens. Who is present? What props are necessary?
2. Describe Kingston.
3. Describe her mother.
4. How much physical movement takes place?
5. Select and record dialogue and any essential stage directions to change the autobiographical narrative to a stage play. Condense and abridge as you wish. Do not include Kingston's thoughts or interpretations.

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

The Woman Warrior
Lesson 3
Handout 7 (page 2)

Name _____
Date _____

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

Mother

Maxine:

Mother:

Maxine:

6. Describe the stage as the curtain comes down.

7. How does staging the scene alter its impact on the audience?

Lesson 4

Moon Orchid

- To consider the role and impact of culture shock
- To identify the change in point of view in chapter 4

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapter 4, which focuses on the story of Moon Orchid, Kingston's aunt. The chapter begins with the family awaiting her arrival at the airport and concludes with her death in an insane asylum in California. Unlike the first three chapters, it centers on the family's experience rather than on stories from the distant past. Like them, it deals with Chinese-American polarities and women's roles.

All of the characters in this autobiography endured some kind of culture shock; Moon Orchid, like No Name Woman, is one who did not survive. Her experience illustrates the very real dangers involved in trying to integrate two sophisticated and radically different cultures. Why did Brave Orchid push her sister into an ill-advised encounter with a long-absent husband? Kingston offers no answer.

In this chapter Kingston's first-person voice disappears. The narration is third-person, and Kingston herself is just one of the Chinese-American children annoyed and astounded by their weird aunt from China.

Procedure

1. Have students use Quiz 3 as an evaluation tool or to review their understanding of chapter 4.
2. Ask students how the story told in chapter 4 differs from those in the first three chapters. Lead them to see that it focuses on events during Kingston's lifetime rather than on remote stories of China. Kingston also alters the point of view, almost removing herself from the story.
3. Have students complete **Handout 9**.

Suggested Responses:

At the airport they seem alike—two old ladies, each amazed at how much the other has aged.

In China they were both financially supported by husbands working in America, and both were able to live well. Brave Orchid, however, made herself independent, while Moon Orchid remained dependent.

Brave Orchid's husband sent for her; Moon Orchid's did not. In America Brave Orchid has a large family; Moon Orchid is more isolated, with no real husband and only one daughter. In the laundry Brave Orchid works both hard and efficiently. Moon Orchid is inept.

Differing ages at the time of immigration are important; older people often become less able to adapt to change. Moon Orchid seems to have been less down-to-earth and less determined than her sister.

Brave Orchid has adjusted to life in Chinatown, even if never totally to life in America. She has been protected by a context of family and other Chinese immigrants. Moon Orchid becomes disoriented and paranoid.

Brave Orchid is a survivor; Moon Orchid is a victim.

4. Point out that chapter 4 is another illustration of the cultural gap between China and the United States; it expands one of Kingston's dominant concerns, the difficulty of integrating Chinese roots with American realities, especially for women.
5. Have small groups complete part A of **Handout 10**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Behavior that seems ordinary and acceptable in the United States would be judged rude and offensive.*
 2. *Suddenly ways of talking and acting that have always been rewarded are likely to result in derision.*
 3. *The businessman's negotiations could be ruined if he does not know and practice the local customs.*
 4. *People might consider her immoral.*
 5. *The person would be unfamiliar with skills needed to survive such a life.*
6. Work through part B of the handout with the students.

Suggested Responses:

1. *She seemed to expect someone—her sister or her daughter—to provide a safe Chinese home for her.*
2. *She found them interesting but foreign.*
3. *Oddly, Brave Orchid seemed to think she could reactivate old Chinese practices regarding marriage in America.*
4. *Moon Orchid seemed fairly satisfied with what her husband had given her; she feared an unpleasant encounter with him.*
5. *Moon Orchid's guide in her strange new world was not a very reliable one in the situation.*
6. *They thought she was very strange. She made them feel alienated from the Chinese.*

7. *The ethnic diversity of the United States differs radically from Moon Orchid's experience of China and Hong Kong, which are more homogeneous. To her the diversity was frightening.*
 8. *She felt safe in the hospital, where she took on a comfortable role of mothering.*
 9. *The story illustrates the tremendous gap between traditional Chinese culture and American culture, underscoring the tensions involved in being Chinese-American, especially Chinese-American and female.*
7. Point out that in chapters 1, 2, and 3 Kingston asserts herself as the "I" speaking voice, the first-person narrator. Ask: What happens to that "I" voice in chapter 4? Lead students to see that she switches to third-person, an imagined viewpoint. Kingston herself appears to be simply one of the antisocial, secretive children—the absent-minded and messy oldest daughter.
 8. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the first page of chapter 5. Point out that the entire story of the confrontation in Los Angeles is Kingston's creation (fictionalization) based on a story she heard from her sister, who heard from their brother, who was there part of the time. Like a knot-maker, she says, she has twisted the story's lines to create a design. Have students complete **Handout 11**.

Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid

Directions: Use the following chart to compare and contrast Moon Orchid and Brave Orchid and their experiences transplanting themselves from China to the United States.

| | Moon Orchid | Brave Orchid |
|---------------------|-------------|--------------|
| At the airport | | |
| Life in China | | |
| Family | | |
| In the laundry | | |
| Age and personality | | |
| Cultural adjustment | | |
| Outcomes | | |

Culture Shock

Part A.

Directions: Culture shock is a phenomenon that occurs when a person is removed from familiar social practices and expectations and is immersed in a situation in which all of the rules are different. Sometimes culture shock is mild, resulting in minor embarrassments and leading to amusing stories. Sometimes it is very severe, resulting in chronic anxiety, fear, and a nagging sense of unreality. Describe the culture shock a person might experience in each of the following circumstances.

1. An American teenager visits a country in which all young people are expected to defer to adults and authority figures.
2. Someone raised in a religious family and social environment goes to a college where people generally make fun of religion.
3. An American businessman visits a country where shaking hands is considered crude behavior and smiling is considered a weakness.
4. An American woman visits a country where all decent women are expected to be veiled and dressed in long-sleeved, ankle-length dresses whenever they are in public.
5. Someone born and raised in a large, modern city is forced to live in a primitive agricultural area.

Part B.

Directions: Use the following questions to consider the role of culture shock in Moon Orchid's experience in the United States.

1. What did Moon Orchid seem to expect to find in America?
2. How did she respond to Brave Orchid's family and home?
3. To what extent was Brave Orchid herself out of touch with reality in dealing with Moon Orchid?
4. Moon Orchid herself did not seem particularly eager to see her husband. Why?
5. How did her dependence on Brave Orchid cripple her in the encounter with the doctor?
6. How did Brave Orchid's children respond to Moon Orchid?
7. How did the ethnic diversity of California differ from Moon Orchid's previous experiences? How did this diversity affect her?
8. Why was Moon Orchid happy in the mental hospital?
9. Why did Kingston devote an entire chapter totally to the story of Moon Orchid in America?

Becoming a Knot-Maker

Directions: A string is a long, narrow, straight thread or cord, useful for tying things, but not very decorative. A rope is similar, though thicker. Yet, as Maxine Hong Kingston says at the beginning of chapter 5, a knot-maker can use practical but dull string or rope to create very complicated and powerful designs. Become a knot-maker, and twist the following strings into stories.

1. The child gave no excuse for his bad behavior. He let his mother do most of the talking. He looked up nervously, though, when the security guard produced a photograph of the crime and asked why he wanted seventeen watches.
2. After dating on and off for ten years, Jeff and Julie have announced their engagement. No one knows why they waited so long. They plan to honeymoon in the Bahamas, where Jeff went on vacation last spring.
3. As a college senior, ranking in the top 5 percent of her class, Carla quit school and moved to New Mexico. She told me she was going, but she did not say why. I heard she has a job somewhere in Santa Fe selling silver jewelry.

Lesson 5

The Girl Who Would Not Talk

Objectives

- To consider the role of silence in *The Woman Warrior*
- To analyze Kingston's conflicts with the quiet girl and with her mother
- To discuss the experience of misunderstanding others' meanings

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson is based on a reading of chapter 5. Kingston's description of her attack on the silent girl in the school lavatory is frequently excerpted in anthologies. It conveys anger and self-hatred festering and exploding. Kingston punished the other girl brutally for the things she hated in herself: her silence, her femininity, her passivity, her weakness, her Chinese-ness. The illness Kingston calls "mysterious" seems no mystery to the reader; such a violent outburst might well result in physical and psychological breakdown.

A second outburst later in the chapter is equally important. While the first one confined her to home and bed for a year and a half, the second forced her to leave home. Again the issue was silence versus the aching need to confess the truth, to name a lifetime of resentments. The ensuing argument between mother and daughter reveals complexities of understanding and misunderstanding, the very real difficulty of discerning the false from the true, the imperative to voice oneself.

The concluding section of the chapter combines two stories, one a family memory told by the mother, the other a Chinese legend narrated by Kingston herself. It is the final example of the technique central to *The Woman Warrior* as a whole, talking-story. Like her mother's talking-stories, it is fanciful and imaginative with an instructive purpose, suggesting the possibility of reconciliation.

Procedure

1. Use Quiz 4 as an evaluation tool or as a way to review understanding of chapter 5.
2. Write the following adages on the chalkboard:

Silence is golden.

Silence is the mother of wisdom

Silence is truth.

Silence is strength.

- Ask students to decide whether each is true or false and to give reasons for their opinions. Then ask whether Maxine Hong Kingston would agree or disagree. Lead them to see that although the silence in *The Woman Warrior* is negative, sometimes silence can be positive.

3. Have students complete **Handout 12**.

Sample Responses:

Bad silence—*secrecy, stalking, fear, emptiness, menace, insecurity, control*

Good silence—*peace, calm, understanding, trust, confidence, concentration*

The silence in The Woman Warrior is negative and destructive because it is linked with secrecy, fear of deportation, insecurity, shame, and alienation.

4. Point out that the incident describing Kingston's attack on the quiet girl in the lavatory is one of the most famous sections of *The Woman Warrior*, frequently anthologized in literature texts. Ask students to brainstorm reasons for this. Lead them to see that, like "No Name Woman," it can stand alone as a story unit. It describes events familiar to many young people, and it deals with key issues of self-understanding, self-acceptance, and respect for others.
5. Have small groups complete **Handout 13**. Then ask volunteers to record headlines on the chalkboard. Compare and contrast results. Samples: *Chinese girls fight in school washroom. Retarded girl attacked by classmate.*

6. Have each group read aloud its news article. Encourage specific details.

Sample Information:

Who—*sixth graders; Chinese girls; daughter of laundry owner and gambler; mother speaking no English; girls considered quiet and shy by former teachers, classmates*

What—*unprovoked attack; hair-pulling; pinching*

Where—*American school, girls' bathroom*

When—*late afternoon, after school hours*

How—*one-on-one attack; no weapons; no resistance*

Why—*motivation unclear; attacker sick, in parents' custody; victim unable to talk to reporter; parents report that victim says other girl kept talking about importance of talking*

7. Point out that another fight occurs later in the chapter, this one verbal and between mother and daughter. Have two volunteers do a dramatic reading of the dialogue from Kingston's insistence that "the hulk" be sent away to her mother's commenting that she has not turned out well.

8. Have students complete **Handout 14**.

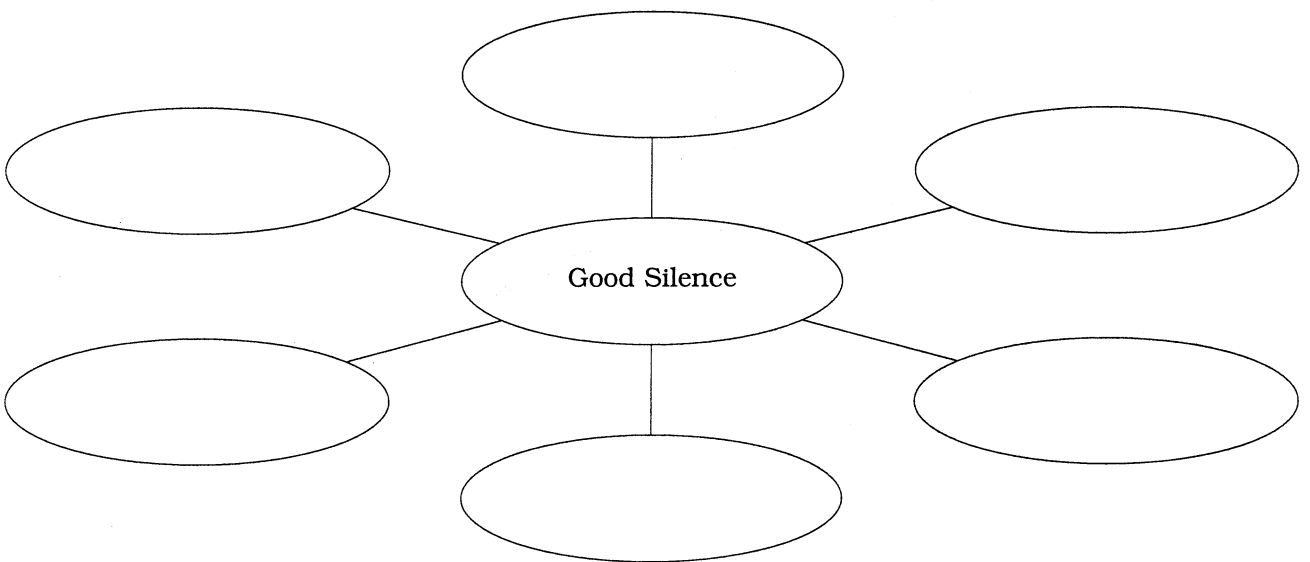
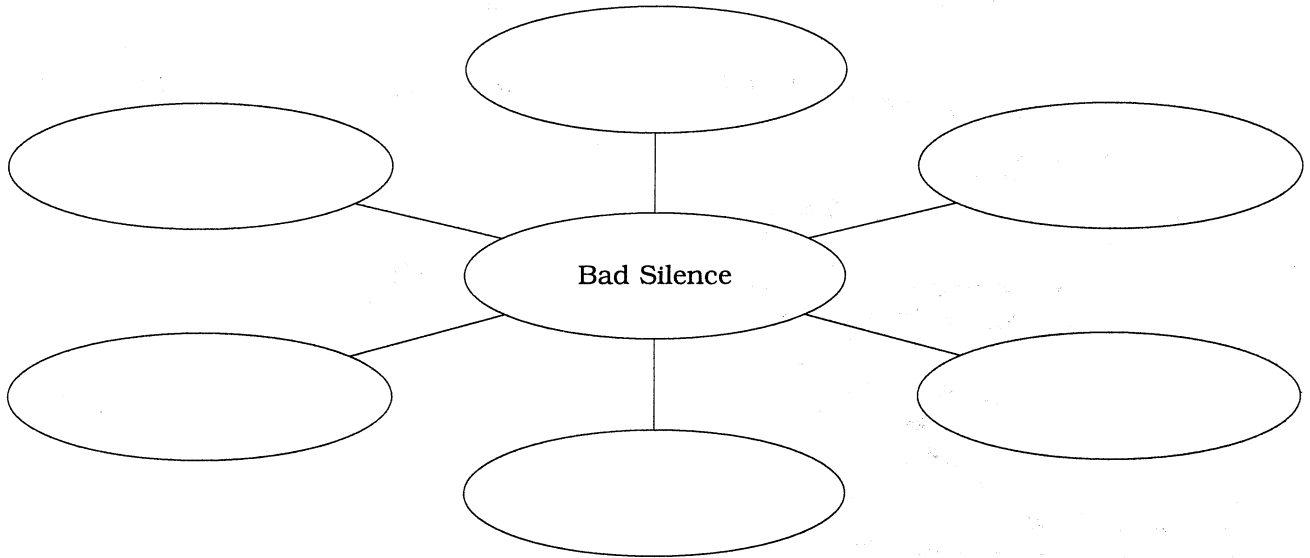
Suggested Responses:

She thought her mother considered her ugly, worthless, and stupid; she believed her parents wanted to get rid of her, that her mother cut her tongue to hurt, not to help her. She misunderstood many of the talking-stories; she did not understand Chinese irony. All of these perceptions may have been false, just as Ho Chi Kuei may be not negative but very positive, signifying a strong foundation for the future.

9. Ask students whether the text suggests that the argument caused a final break between Kingston and her mother. Lead students to see that references throughout the autobiography and at the very end show that the two remain close, although their relationship is not totally serene. Have a volunteer read aloud the closing sentence of the autobiography. Point out that these words suggest the possibility of harmony and adaptability, a positive synthesis.
10. Have students complete **Handout 15** individually. Use discretion in inviting volunteers to share responses.

Silence!

Directions: "Silence is golden," according to the old adage. In reality, sometimes it is, and sometimes it is not. Use the following clusters to show when silence is an enemy and when it is a friend.



Why is the silence in *The Woman Warrior* a bad kind of silence?

Incident Report

Directions: Newspaper reporters use basic questions to organize information and write articles. Imitate their technique, and gather information to report on the conflict between Kingston and the silent Chinese girl in the bathroom.

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

How?

Why?

Write a brief article reporting the incident to a local newspaper, and create a headline.

Headline:

Article:

Recognizing Truth and Falsehood

Directions: During the argument described in chapter 5, Kingston's mother accused her of failing to distinguish jokes from reality, truth from falsehood. The discussion of the meaning of the phrase "Ho Chi Kuei" demonstrates the possibility of alternative meanings. Indicate what Kingston thought about each of the following topics; then indicate alternatives.

| | Kingston thought . . . | Maybe . . . |
|--------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Cutting her tongue | | |
| Marriage | | |
| Her appearance | | |
| Her intelligence | | |
| Her value | | |
| Talking-story | | |
| Ho Chi Kuei | | |

Conflict in the Open

Directions: Chapter 5 of *The Woman Warrior* describes two serious conflicts, one with the quiet girl and the other with the mother, that say something about who Kingston is. Think and write about some ways the conflicts in your life illuminate your character.

1. Have you ever attacked another person physically? Describe the situation. What was your motivation? How did the other person react? What happened to both of you?
2. Have you ever been physically attacked by someone? What did that person say and do? Was there a reason for the attack? How did you react? What happened to both of you?
3. Have you ever been deeply hurt by something someone said to or about you? Describe the circumstances. Did misunderstanding play any role? Explain.
4. Have you ever had a serious argument with a friend or family member? What caused it? How did it escalate? How did it come to an end? Write a dialogue demonstrating the conflict.

Lesson 6

Considerations of Genre

Objectives

- To understand the meaning of the term “talking-story”
- To recognize and describe challenges involved in writing autobiography
- To consider theatrical possibilities of *The Woman Warrior*

Notes to the Teacher

Kingston frequently mentions her mother’s fondness for “talking-story.” This storytelling style combines myths, memories, imagination, morals, and entertainment. Each chapter’s title reflects its key example: first, No Name Woman and her dreadful experience, a parable against promiscuity; second, Fa Mu Lan, the victorious warrior woman trained by a series of initiation rites; third, the mother’s conquest of the Sitting Ghost; fourth, the empress with the moral responsibility to save her imprisoned emperor; finally, another warrior woman who translates her experience into music. All deal with the power and/or powerlessness of women, as does *The Woman Warrior* as a whole, Kingston’s own talking-story blend of memory, imagination, and message.

Like all autobiographers, Kingston faces challenges involved in telling one’s own story truthfully. In this genre, as perhaps in all, the guiding premise is that truth is more important than facts. Autobiographical theory recognizes a number of distinct problems of this literary form; analysis reflects Kingston’s clear mastery of them.

Like many other innovative works, *The Woman Warrior*, with its companion piece, *China Men*, has tantalized theater people to create dramatic interpretations. On one hand, the action is so internal, centered on the maturation of a Chinese-American girl, that a stage presentation might tend to be dull and actionless; still, it is filled with theatrical opportunities such as ghosts, warriors, mythological figures, and, at the end, Chinese theater.

Procedure

1. Have small groups complete **Handout 16**.

Suggested Responses:

1. See *Notes to the Teacher*.
 2. All center on women’s roles and teach a combination of courage and docility; all blend realism and fantasy.
 3. In “No Name Woman” the mother’s memory-story is elaborated by Kingston’s imagination; the author inserts herself into the story of Fa Mu Lan and claims her own warrior role; the story of the mother’s medical education and practice is highlighted by a ghost story illustrating her special powers; the story of the brave Empress of the East is a fantastic and ironic contrast to the real Moon Orchid; finally, the integration of stories from mother and daughter at the end highlights the author’s mission to “sing” a translation of the story she has lived.
 4. She had difficulty recognizing what was true because of the combinations of fact and fantasy. She tended to take figures of speech literally, thus misunderstanding them.
 5. She, too, has a message to convey, a story to tell.
 6. It combines memory, myth, and imagination to teach about growing up marginalized, female, and Chinese-American.
 7. The woman warrior is Kingston herself, as well as her mother, Fa Mu Lan, and Ts’ai Yen. The subtitle accents the feminist emphasis (“girlhood,” not “childhood”) and the sense of alienation from China and America, both of which are full of “ghosts.”
2. Remind students that *The Woman Warrior* is autobiography and that they, too, have tried some autobiographical writing in imitation of Kingston. Have them describe their responses to these writings.

3. Have the class complete **Handout 17**.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Kingston meets these challenges well. She combines local color with universal issues; she acknowledges gaps in understanding and includes actions, thoughts, and fantasies; the multiple "I"s emerge throughout the story; selected stories repeat themes and vary on them; she is intent on telling the truth, on ridding herself of secrecy; she is honest but not ruthless in dealing with others.*
4. Point out that on several occasions the class has presented sections of *The Woman Warrior* in dramatic form. Ask students whether they think the whole work could be made into a play. Ask about specific scenes. Sample questions: How would you stage "No Name Woman"? (perhaps as pantomime) What would you do with Fa Mu Lan? (maybe put her on stilts)

5. Have a volunteer read aloud the review on **Handout 18**. Then conduct a discussion based on the questions.

Suggested Responses:

1. *importance of voice; growing up Chinese-American and female; folk and family myths*
2. *colorful, exotic pageantry; imaginative staging*
3. *a writer growing up Chinese-American*
4. *feminist issues*
5. *over-emphasis on pageantry; need for a more human dimension*

Talking-Story

Directions: Throughout *The Woman Warrior* Kingston refers to her mother, and later to herself, as someone who likes to talk-story. Although she never defines the term “talk-story,” we can infer its meaning from her examples, which are highlighted by the chapter titles. Follow the directions to analyze the meaning of talking-story.

1. Identify the talking-story in each of the chapters.

“No Name Woman”

“White Tigers”

“Shaman”

“At the Western Palace”

“A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe”

2. What elements do all of these stories have in common? What are their purposes? How do they differ from other stories?
3. How are imagination and truth interwoven in each one?
4. What problems did Kingston have with understanding talk-story when she was growing up? Why?
5. Why does she talk-story now?
6. In what sense is all of *The Woman Warrior* one extended talking-story? What is its message?
7. Reexamine and interpret the autobiography’s title and subtitle.

The Challenges of Autobiography

Directions: In writing about their lives, all autobiographers face some special challenges. Read the following information and answer the questions.

Challenge 1 What makes me important enough to be the subject of an autobiography? What aspects of my story would others find interesting and relevant?

Challenge 2 Self-knowledge is limited, changing, often full of illusions. How can I tell the truth when I do not know the whole truth?

Challenge 3 A life is more than just a series of activities. It also includes thoughts, emotions, stories, and fantasies. Which of these should I include?

Challenge 4 Every autobiography has a multiple “I”—author, narrator, and character. These “I’s” are related but distinct.

For example, the author creates the narrative voice; narrator and character are separated by time, often by many years.

Challenge 5 It is both impossible and undesirable to tell everything! The author must select memories and clusters of memories. Which ones are really essential to my story?

Challenge 6 Memory can be deceptive. We remember things, but we also forget things, sometimes permanently. Sometimes we remember things wrongly.

Challenge 7 The autobiographer may want to keep some secrets. When is it legitimate to withhold information? Will it be obvious that I have kept a secret? Do I tend to present myself as better or worse than I really am?

Challenge 8 People’s lives intersect and overlap. When I tell my story, I also tell other people’s stories. What if they do not want these stories told?

1. How did Maxine Hong Kingston meet each of these challenges in *The Woman Warrior*?

Challenge 1

Challenge 2

Challenge 3

Challenge 4

Challenge 5

Challenge 6

Challenge 7

Challenge 8

2. What problems might they pose for you as an autobiographer?

The Woman Warrior in the Theatre

Directions: Read the following review of a theatre production of *The Woman Warrior*.

The Lady Becomes the Tiger

The Woman Warrior makes grand spectacle of a writer's youth

By William A. Henry III

The article "The Lady Becomes the Tiger" could not be included in the electronic edition of this resource. The document is available on the Web site of *Time* magazine: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,980940,00.html>.

1. What issues that we have considered in discussing *The Woman Warrior* also come up in this review?
2. What does the reviewer like about the production?
3. What does he see as its central theme?
4. What does the theatre director see as the central issue?
5. What does the reviewer criticize about the production?

Quiz 1—Chapters 1-2

- ____ 1. The narrator's parents came from:
a. Japan
b. Korea
c. China
d. India
- ____ 2. The Gold Mountain is:
a. a volcano
b. a temple
c. a casino
d. America
- ____ 3. The aunt in the mother's story:
a. settled in America
b. killed herself
c. went to Hong Kong
d. died in childbirth
- ____ 4. The narrator's mother often:
a. told riddles
b. told stories
c. went to movies
d. spent days in silence
- ____ 5. Which of the following does not seem to concern the narrator?
a. relations between the sexes
b. dealing with secrets
c. cultural differences
d. becoming wealthy
- ____ 6. Fa Mu Lan is:
a. a woman warrior
b. a princess
c. a slave
d. the narrator's daughter
- ____ 7. Most of the second chapter consists of:
a. memories of working in the laundry
b. stories about No Name Woman
c. stories about the narrator's mother
d. relating a Chinese legend
- ____ 8. During childhood the narrator:
a. had a clear understanding that women are inferior to men
b. knew that women are superior
c. recognized equality between the sexes
d. received contradictory messages
- ____ 9. The narrator frequently refers to the custom of:
a. binding girls' feet
b. men wearing pig tails
c. women walking at least five feet behind their husbands
d. having tea ceremonies
- ____ 10. Which of the following is not true about the narrator?
a. She got good grades.
b. She went to college.
c. She went to war in Viet Nam.
d. She opposes bigotry.
- ____ 11. The narrator says that news about the Communist takeover has been:
a. horrifying
b. thrilling
c. confusing
d. boring
- ____ 12. The narrator relates the inscriptions on the warrior woman's back to:
a. ancient myths
b. Chinese magazines
c. tribal totems
d. her own mission to write

Quiz 2—Chapter 3

- ____ 1. The author begins by describing her mother's
- medical diploma
 - wedding picture
 - photograph albums
 - scrapbook
- ____ 2. The mother went to school after
- her husband abandoned her and went to America
 - her children died
 - her village was destroyed in a fire
 - the Communists took over
- ____ 3. The mother seems to have been
- a very ordinary Chinese woman
 - unusually slow to learn
 - bright, brave, and hardworking
 - eager to leave China for America
- ____ 4. The narrator mentions that her mother has always liked to tell
- religious stories
 - ghost stories
 - fairy tales
 - stories about family members back in China
- ____ 5. Which of the following did the mother not take to the haunted room?
- a knife
 - a lamp
 - a textbook
 - a novel
- ____ 6. The narrator describes her mother's encounter with
- a Sitting Ghost
 - a Frog Spirit
 - a criminal in an alley
 - Communist authorities
- ____ 7. The mother insisted that her friends help her by
- singing a religious song
 - pulling her ears
 - tutoring her before exams
 - giving her extra food
- ____ 8. The mother returned to her home village as
- a nurse
 - a doctor
 - a military officer
 - a hungry beggar
- ____ 9. The mother's name is
- Lotus Leaf
 - Cherry Blossom
 - Moonflower
 - Brave Orchid
- ____ 10. Before returning to the village, the mother went to the market especially to buy herself
- a female slave
 - new clothes
 - souvenirs of life in the city
 - a canary
- ____ 11. She also bought all of the following except
- a puppy
 - a turtle
 - a parrot
 - a large bag of sweets
- ____ 12. The mother would never never help with
- people who were dying
 - serious diseases
 - pregnant women
 - old people

- ____ 13. The narrator mentions that her mother
- a. is very picky about food
 - b. will eat anything except fish
 - c. is a vegetarian
 - d. can eat anything
- ____ 14. What did the mother keep in a glass jar on a shelf?
- a. flowers
 - b. a preserved hand
 - c. pickled vegetables
 - d. a collection of marbles
- ____ 15. What happened to the village crazy lady?
- a. She was killed in a Japanese bombing.
 - b. The narrator's mother cured her.
 - c. She was stoned by the villagers.
 - d. She drowned herself in a well.
- ____ 16. The Chinese immigrants saw white people as
- a. ghosts
 - b. friends
 - c. criminals
 - d. a superior race
- ____ 17. Toward the end of the chapter, the narrator mentions that every time she goes home, she
- a. feels that she wants to visit China
 - b. wishes she had never left home
 - c. gets sick
 - d. realizes that she and her mother have nothing in common

Quiz 3—Chapter 4

- ____1. Brave Orchid went to the airport to meet her
 - a. aunt
 - b. niece
 - c. sister
 - d. best friend
- ____2. Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid were both amazed at
 - a. how old the other looks
 - b. each other's beauty
 - c. how handsome Brave Orchid's husband is
 - d. how kind the white people are
- ____3. What did Lovely Orchid send everyone?
 - a. Chinese candy
 - b. Communist propaganda
 - c. tea bags
 - d. shoes
- ____4. How does Fa Mu Lan come into the story again?
 - a. as a small figurine
 - b. in a children's storybook
 - c. in the narrator's description of a Chinese movie
 - d. as a paper doll
- ____5. Brave Orchid was determined that Moon Orchid do something about her
 - a. crippled feet
 - b. bad teeth
 - c. husband
 - d. childish sense of humor
- ____6. At the laundry Moon Orchid
 - a. was very helpful
 - b. burned her arm badly
 - c. mixed up the customers' clothes
 - d. was clumsy and slow
- ____7. The women in the large storefront room were taking a break from
 - a. gambling
 - b. playing bridge
 - c. working in a textile factory
 - d. teaching school
- ____8. Brave Orchid's children thought Moon Orchid was
 - a. wonderful
 - b. mysterious
 - c. strange
 - d. wicked
- ____9. How did they get to Los Angeles?
 - a. by car
 - b. by train
 - c. by horse and buggy
 - d. by bus
- ____10. Moon Orchid's husband was
 - a. a lawyer
 - b. a professor
 - c. a doctor
 - d. a dentist
- ____11. Whom did Moon Orchid suspect of plotting against her?
 - a. Mexicans
 - b. Japanese
 - c. white ghosts
 - d. her own family
- ____12. Brave Orchid said that one sign of madness is that a person
 - a. refuses to speak
 - b. talks all the time
 - c. says the same thing over and over
 - d. laughs all the time
- ____13. Where did Moon Orchid finally go?
 - a. back to Hong Kong
 - b. to a mental hospital
 - c. to the Chinatown in New York City
 - d. to prison
- ____14. What caused Moon Orchid's problems?
 - a. her husband's affairs
 - b. culture shock
 - c. old age
 - d. jealousy

Quiz 4—Chapter 5

- _____ 1. The author says that when she was little her mother cut her
- ears
 - tongue
 - toe
 - nose
- _____ 2. What did she used to do with her school paintings?
- cut them up
 - hang them all over the walls
 - bury them in the garden
 - cover them with black
- _____ 3. At American school all of the Chinese girls had great trouble
- talking
 - reading aloud
 - learning mathematics
 - accepting the other students
- _____ 4. In the girls' bathroom the narrator
- found a supply of drugs and alcohol
 - hid her diaries
 - was attacked by a another girl
 - tormented another girl
- _____ 5. Her sixth grade was interrupted by
- a visit to China
 - her need to work full-time in the laundry
 - a long illness
 - her mother's decision to teach her at home
- _____ 6. Kingston's early school records say that her IQ was
- at genius levels
 - above average
 - average
 - substantially below average
- _____ 7. In the narrator's neighborhood there were an unusual number of
- retarded children
 - insane women
 - violent men
 - cancer cases
- _____ 8. Which of the following did the narrator not do to avoid an arranged marriage
- hide in the cupboard
 - pretend to limp
 - wear sloppy clothes
 - drop dishes
- _____ 9. The wealthy woman criticized Kingston's
- way of dressing
 - unfriendly facial expression
 - voice
 - poor report card
- _____ 10. What did "the hulk" have in his boxes?
- pornography
 - toys
 - dirty clothing
 - vegetables
- _____ 11. Kingston drew up a list of
- things she wanted to accomplish
 - things she wanted to tell her mother
 - things she wanted to avoid
 - people she hated
- _____ 12. Which of the following things does the narrator not say she wanted to do?
- go to college
 - become a lumberjack
 - become a mathematician
 - become a newspaper reporter
- _____ 13. Relatives in Communist China still write to ask for
- help getting through American immigration
 - help getting to Hong Kong
 - Chinese in America to return home
 - gifts of money
- _____ 14. *The Woman Warrior* closes with
- a description of Kingston's visit to China
 - lyrics from an old Chinese song
 - a talking-story
 - Kingston's long conversation with her father

Quiz Answer Key

Quiz 1

1. c
2. d
3. b
4. b
5. d
6. a
7. d
8. d
9. a
10. c
11. c
12. d

Quiz 2

1. a
2. b
3. c
4. b
5. d
6. a
7. b
8. b
9. d
10. a
11. c
12. a
13. d
14. b
15. c
16. a
17. c

Quiz 3

1. c
2. a
3. d
4. d
5. c
6. d
7. a
8. c
9. a
10. c
11. a
12. c
13. b
14. b

Quiz 4

1. b
2. d
3. a
4. d
5. c
6. d
7. b
8. a
9. c
10. a
11. b
12. c
13. d
14. c

Culminating Activities

Research

1. Research and report on Chinese mythology.
2. Research and report about Chinatowns in the United States.
3. Research and report on the Chinese system of writing.
4. Research and report on the Communist revolution in China.
5. Research and report on the experience of another group of immigrants to America.

Reading

6. Read Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* and relate it to *The Woman Warrior*.
7. Read Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* and compare her autobiographical approach to Kingston's.
8. Read N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and compare it to *The Woman Warrior*.
9. Read Eugenia Collier's short story "Marigolds" and relate it to Kingston's description of the incident in the girls' bathroom.

Imaginative Writing

10. Write your own autobiography, imitating Kingston's style of interweaving memories, family stories, and myths.
11. Rewrite a section of *The Woman Warrior* from some other character's point of view.
12. Rewrite a legend, myth, or fairy tale, incorporating yourself as a major character.
13. Write an original story dealing with Kingston's themes in a different setting.

Critical Writing

14. Analyze Kingston's use of the legend of Fa Mu Lan.
15. Analyze the significance of one of the following segments to *The Woman Warrior* as a whole: the story of No Name Woman; the story of the incident in the bathroom; the story of the mother's purchase of a slave in China; the story of Moon Orchid.
16. Analyze Maxine Hong Kingston's portrait of herself as the main character.
17. Analyze the roles of the male characters in *The Woman Warrior*.
18. Analyze Kingston's treatment of the role and importance of the human voice.
19. Interpret Kingston's choice of subtitle for *The Woman Warrior*: "Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts."

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Nectar in a Sieve/The Woman Warrior

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Nectar in a Sieve

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|-----------|--|
| RL.9-10.1 | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. |
| RL.9-10.2 | Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. |
| RL.9-10.3 | Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. |
| RL.9-10.4 | Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone). |
| RL.9-10.5 | Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise. |
| RL.9-10.6 | Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature. |
| L.9-10.1a | Use parallel structure.* |
| L.9-10.5a | Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text. |
| L.9-10.5b | Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations. |
-

The Woman Warrior

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| RL.11-12.1 | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. |
| RL.11-12.2 | Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and |

- build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
- RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)
- RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
- RL.11-12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
- RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)
- RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- RI.11-12.2 Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.
- RI.11-12.3 Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
- RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).
- RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

- RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- SL.11-12.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- L.11-12.1a Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.
- L.11-12.4a Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- L.11-12.5a Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.
- L.11-12.5b Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations.

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