



When a book is adapted for the stage, parts of it will change. That could be the story itself, the characters, the words and even the way the story is told. Share the following pages with your students and engage them in a conversation about what they notice are the differences between a BOOK and a PLAY.

BOOK CHAPTER

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson

by Bette Bao Lord

A Journey of Ten Thousand Miles

The sea was not calm, nor deep green like jade. It writhed like a fierce, black dragon with chili peppers up its snout. And Shirley never saw the skies. She lingered in her bunk throughout the month-long journey to San Francisco, with no appetite for food, much less adventure.

Mother, though, never faltered. As giant waves sent slippers, suitcases, tables and the chair she sat in slithering to and fro across the floor, she knit on, unperturbed. If she did cry out, it was not because she had crashed into the wall but because she had dropped a stitch.

Father had always claimed that his wife was like no other. It was true. Mother was unique. Everyday things like the tiniest cockroach or a gentle tap on the back made her shriek. Extraordinary things did not alarm her. Shirley knew better than to ask Mother to remove a splinter. Even a droplet of blood made her cringe. Yet when Precious Coins was about to be born and the hospital miles away with bombs falling like hailstones, it was Mother alone who soothed the frantic household and quietly delivered the baby. And now . . . now she who had never dared go even to the nearest market without a companion had taken charge of their journey of ten thousand miles.

At last the ocean ended, and the ship hiccupped to a halt at the harbor. Amitabha! The queasiness was gone. Shirley felt like Shirley again, not like a sick toad.

"Hurry!" Mother said, taking her by the hand. "We must not miss the train."

Shirley could hardly keep up with her as she snaked her way through the crowd of travelers. At every stop, whether immigration or customs, she alone gave the magic password, for not once did they have to [fill out extra forms, not once were their bags opened. All the inspectors seemed bewitched by the lovely, slim Chinese woman who was in such a hurry.

Outside, there was a torrential rain. Somehow, Mother found a taxi and it delivered them to the station not a minute too soon.

Only when they were safe in their compartment when nothing serious could go wrong, did Mother fret. "What if your father is not there to meet us?"

"But you wrote."

"What if the letter was lost?"

"You sent three."

"I did?"

"You told me so yourself."

"What if I made a mistake in the address?"

"You couldn't have, Not on all three."

The what-ifs continued, and Shirley tried not to smile. It was so like Mother to tame a den of tigers and then jump at the sound of a kitten's meow.

Throughout the journey across the United States, Shirley stared out the window of the train. But she remembered nothing of what she saw. Her thoughts were always with Father. Father, who knew how everything worked. Was he not an engineer with a diploma from Shanghai to prove it? Had he not explained why the stars twinkled and how submarines slunk beneath the seas? When she asked why people must die, he had said, "Because we must make room and give others a turn to live." And he could fix anything. Lamps that refused to light. Doors that squeaked. Even quarrels, except for the one between Grand-grand Aunt and Grand-grand Uncle.

How she missed him!

As the wheels of the train clacked along the tracks, they seemed to chant -- *Four more days, just four more days. . . . Three days, just three days. . . . Only two, only two, only two. . . Tomorrow, tomorrow. . . . Today!*

At last it was the hour when their year-long separation would end. Shirley clutched her seat, afraid joy would launch her through the ceiling and whisk her high above the clouds. She fixed her gaze on Mother, who twisted her handkerchief nervously, smiling at someone who was not yet there.

"Can we go now?"

"Better wait till the train has come to a stop. You wouldn't want to fall and skin a knee just before you see Father."

"I'll be careful."

"We will be there soon enough."

"Now?"

"The train is slowing down. Soon."

"Now?"

"Now."

Hand in hand they made their way down the crowded aisle toward the exit, peering out the windows at the people waiting on the platform.

"There he is!" Mother whispered.

SCENE OF A PLAY

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson

Script by Mark Branner

SPECIAL NOTE:

This piece is as a 'memory play' told by two halves of one character; Shirley Temple Wong. During the story, Shirley has two part of herself that are slowly becoming one: her American and Chinese sides. The playwright explored how the two sides might each be a different character.

USA SHIRLEY

The sea was not calm, nor deep green like jade. It writhed like a fierce, black dragon with chili peppers up its snout. I saw no sky of brilliant blue. Instead, I joined forces with many of the other passengers in feeding the angry dragon...

(SHIRLEY – and other passengers – vomit violently “overboard.”)

Mother, though, never faltered. Father always claimed that Mother was like no other. It was true. Everyday things like the tiniest cockroach made her shriek. But extraordinary things did not alarm her. Now, my Mother – the one who never even dared to go to the nearest market without a companion – was taking charge of our journey of ten thousand miles across the sea.

As giant waves sent slippers, suitcases and tables to and fro across the floor, Mother knit on, unperturbed. The only time she ever cried out was not because she had crashed into a wall but because she had dropped a stitch.

(MOTHER cries out. She has dropped a stitch.)

At last the sea ended.

(USA SHIRLEY stops suddenly, trying regain her “land-legs.” She takes a deep sigh. This is immediately interrupted by MOTHER.)

CHINA SHIRLEY/MOTHER

赶快！没时间可以浪费！（Hurry! No time to waste!）

USA SHIRLEY

Hurry?! But we've been on a boat for over a month!

CHINA SHIRLEY/MOTHER

你能够再坚持——一个星期。（You can last another week.）

USA SHIRLEY

Another week?!

CHINA SHIRLEY/MOTHER

先是移民局。（First immigration.）

USA SHIRLEY

Immigration?!

CHINA SHIRLEY/MOTHER

然后是海关！ (Then customs!)

USA SHIRLEY

Customs?!

CHINA SHIRLEY/MOTHER

赶快！我们绝对不能错过火车。 (Hurry! We must not miss the train!)

USA SHIRLEY

Train?!

(The loud whistle of a train is heard. Immediately they are “traveling” again as USA SHIRLEY picks up the narration. Now both SHIRLEYS mimic each other, bouncing along the tracks.)

And now more waiting. The journey across America seemed as if would never end. The wheels of the train clacked along the tracks, chanting on and on...

(The following section should sound rhythmically like the cadence of a train clicking along, with the voices in Mandarin and English enhancing one another.)

CHINA SHIRLEY

还有四天。 。 。 还有四天。 。 。 (Four more days and...four more days and...)

USA SHIRLEY

Four more days and...four more days and...

CHINA SHIRLEY

还有三天。 。 。 还有三天。 。 。 (Three more days and...three more days and...)

USA SHIRLEY

Three more days and...three more days and...

CHINA SHIRLEY

还有两天。 。 。 还有两天。 。 。 (Two more days and...two more days and...)

USA SHIRLEY

Two more days and...two more days and...

CHINA SHIRLEY

还有一天。。。还有一天。。。还有一天。。。 (One more day and...one more day and...one more day and...)

USA SHIRLEY

One more day and...one more day and...one more day and...

(New York City sign appears. The sound of the train begins to slow.)

USA SHIRLEY

Can we go now?

(They react to an unseen/unheard MOTHER indicating that they need to wait.)

CHINA SHIRLEY

现在？ (Now?)

USA SHIRLEY

Now?

(Again, they react to an unseen/unheard MOTHER saying, "No.")

CHINA SHIRLEY

现在？ (Now?)

USA SHIRLEY

Now?

(There is the screech of brakes. The train has arrived.)

USA SHIRLEY

Now, Mother. Now!

CHINA SHIRLEY

现在, 妈妈。现在！ (Now, Mother. Now!)

(Both SHIRLEYS descend the steps of the train.)

USA SHIRLEY

There he is!