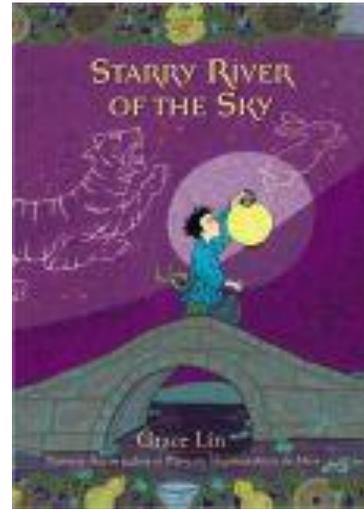


READERS THEATER

The Story of the Old Sage by Grace Lin

“The Story of the Old Sage” is one of many folktales included in Grace Lin’s novel *Starry River of the Sky*. This Readers Theater script of “The Story of the Old Sage” was written by Katherine Paterson for the Children’s Literary Lights Readers Theater performance at the 2013 Library of Congress National Book Festival in Washington, D.C. The performance was created and presented by The National Children’s Book and Literacy Alliance (NCBLA), in partnership with the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress.



Readers: Ten readers. Fewer readers can be used by sharing roles.

Length: Approximately 10 minutes.

Roles: Madame Chang, Rendi, Peiyi, Tiwu, Old Sage, Voice 1, Voice 2, Voice 3, Voice 4, Villager.

Notes: This script has been double-spaced and formatted in a larger size font to facilitate easy reading when printed. This script includes one sign for the Voice 3 reader to hold up (BURP) and a second sign (LAUGH) for another reader to hold up for audience participation.

For additional Readers Theater scripts, visit: thencbla.org and click on Readers Theater in the EDUCATION menu.

To learn more about the NCBLA, visit their website: thencbla.org

To learn more about the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, visit their website: Read.gov

[MADAME CHANG] Rendi, Peiyi says that you haven’t ever smiled since you’ve been here. Is that right?

[RENDI] (*shrugs*) Maybe.

[MADAME CHANG] Yesterday, I noticed that you seemed to enjoy my story. Am I right?

[RENDI] It was interesting.

[MADAME CHANG] Well, I want to make a deal with you. If I can make you smile . . . no, if I can make you laugh with this next story, then for every story I tell, you must tell one of your own.

[RENDI] I don’t know any stories!

[MADAME CHANG] Oh, I’m sure you do. You’ve just never shared them before.

[PEIYI] I want to hear a funny story!

[RENDI] Does it have to be a good story?

[MADAME CHANG] Any story you want. We won’t complain.

[PEIYI] I will!

[MADAME CHANG] Is it a deal?

[PEIYI] Oh, Rendi! You’re not going to laugh anyway.

[RENDI] All right. Why not?

[VOICE 3] Madame Chang smiled. And then she began the story.

[MADAME CHANG] Once there was an old man who lived on a mountaintop. Some thought he was a crazy old man. Others thought he was the Mountain Spirit or even an immortal. But most believed he was a sage of great wisdom.

[VOICE 3] Many sought him—some for answers, some for advice and some to be his students. The old man answered all the questions and solved all the problems, but he shooed away all the hopeful students. However, one student named Tiwu refused to give up. He returned over and over again, begging and pleading, until finally the sage agreed to teach him.

[VOICE 2] Tiwu was an eager pupil. At the sun’s first light, the sage would share the old stories and teachings, and they would spend the rest of the day in deep contemplation. But at night, when the moon climbed into the sky, the old man ignored his student and, instead, read to himself from a large book.

[VOICE 3] Tiwu wondered about this. It was obvious to him that there was great wisdom in the book that only the sage read. What special knowledge was in it? He yearned to know. But the sage never offered him even a glance at one of the pages.

[TIWU] He will allow me to read the book when I have mastered everything else he has taught me.

[VOICE 1] With great effort his progress was considerable. Soon, when people came to the old sage for answers, Tiwu was able to give them. Before long, he also began to gain the reputation of being a wise man. Encouraged by this, Tiwu gathered the courage to ask the sage about the book he read every night.

[TIWU] Master, what are you reading in that book?

[SAGE] The page I am reading right now is about the secret to attaining peace.

[VOICE 2] Tiwu was in awe. Only the wisest and greatest of sages would know the secret to peace. What other extraordinary answers were in that book?

[TIWU] Master, may I read the secret to peace too?

[SAGE] Do you really wish to know the secret to peace? or do you simply want to read the Book of Fortune?

[TIWU] Both.

[SAGE] Do you really believe you are ready?

[TIWU] Yes.

[SAGE] I am not sure.

[TIWU] I am! Please, how can I prove it to you?

[SAGE] *(after a thoughtful pause)* At the bottom of this mountain, you will see a tall tree overlooking a lake. Climb the tree to the highest branch and sit there in contemplation for ninety-nine days and nights. If you are able to do that, you may read the Book of Fortune and the secret to achieving peace.

[VOICE 1] Immediately, Tiwu traveled down the mountain, and he found the tall tree overlooking the lake. The tree was smooth and straight, like a giant paintbrush, and seemed almost as tall as the mountain he had just left. With great difficulty, Tiwu wrapped a rope around the trunk of the tree and made his way up to the highest branch.

[VOICE 2] Nearby villagers, finding it easier to call up questions to someone in a tree than to climb a mountain, sent him baskets of food, which he hauled up using his rope. Soon, he began to bestow answers and advice to a steady stream of followers.

[VOICE 3] On the ninety-sixth night, there was a terrible storm.

[VOICE 1] The wind shrieked and screamed, and the thunder’s roars echoed for miles away.

[VOICE 2] Lightning slashed the sky and rain attacked like vicious arrows.

[VOICE 4] The tree swayed and bent, but Tiwu, remembering his master’s teachings, did not panic.

[VOICE 3] Even as nearby branches cracked and fell and rain and wind slapped his face raw, he sat silently, like a stone statue.

[VOICE 2] The next morning, everyone crowded around the tree to see Tiwu sitting calmly up in the branches.

[VILLAGER] He is without doubt, a great sage.

[VILLAGER] Only one who has achieved real enlightenment could be unmoved by that storm.

[VOICE 3] Tiwu heard the praises from the ground and felt quite satisfied.

[TIWU] I have truly proven myself.

[VOICE 3] And so he wrote a poem:

Like a mountain of stone,

The most powerful wind,

The most thunderous noise,

Cannot move me.

Steadfast my mind.

Deliverance my gain.

[VOICE 2] He decided to send his poem to the old man on the mountain, and one of the villagers quickly brought it to the sage. The old man read the poem and smiled. Then he flipped the paper over and wrote in dark letters:

[VOICE 3] BURP

(Reader holds up a sign that says: “BURP.”)

[VOICE 1] When Tiwu saw what his master had scrawled on the page he was very insulted.

[TIWU] Burp? I speak of sacrifice and great knowledge, and he returns this? What does he mean?

[VOICE 2] Offended Tiwu rushed down the tree and up the mountain.

[VOICE 1] With every step, he felt more resentful of his master’s response. So when he finally saw the old sage sitting calmly, Tiwu immediately began to berate him.

[TIWU] What is this message? Burp? What did you mean?

[VOICE 1] The old man waited until Tiwu paused for breath.

[SAGE] Ah, Tiwu, you said the most powerful wind and the loudest noise could not move you. But it took only one burp to bring you here.

[VOICE 1] With those words Madame Chang finished the story and looked at Rendi. His mouth had curved, and a noise snorted out of his nose.

(Hold up LAUGH sign.)

[VOICE 1] It was only when the sound joined everyone else’s that Rendi realized that he was laughing.

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