

STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

BACKGROUND

Gold Mountain is a YA historical novel set in China and America from 1867-1869. During this period, thousands of Chinese left the Guangdong Province of southern China to make their fortune in the United States. They were sojourners who saw America as the “Gold Mountain,” a land of immense wealth and opportunity. Many of the Chinese found jobs in the mines of California.

In 1863, construction began on the transcontinental railroad, a US government project that would eventually connect Sacramento, California, to Omaha, Nebraska. (Preexisting tracks ran from the East Coast to Nebraska, so the project would make it possible to travel between the East and West Coasts by train.) Two rival railroad companies, the Central Pacific Railroad Company and the Union Pacific Railroad Company, were in charge of the job.

In 1864, Central Pacific hired the first Chinese laborers to work on the western portion of the railroad. By 1865, thousands of Chinese migrant workers—known as sojourners—made up a majority of the workforce. Approximately 10,000–15,000 Chinese from the Guangdong Province of southern China worked on the railroad at any given time. By May 10, 1869, workers had laid 690 miles of track from Sacramento—through the Sierra Nevada mountain range and the deserts of Nevada and Utah—to Promontory Point, Utah, where their track met up with the Union Pacific’s track. The work was grueling, backbreaking, and sometimes deadly.

PRE-READING

Prior to reading the book, introduce background information on the transcontinental railroad. **Stanford’s Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project** <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/> has a wealth of background information and historic images of the Chinese experience on the transcontinental railroad.

PAGES OF INTEREST INCLUDE:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

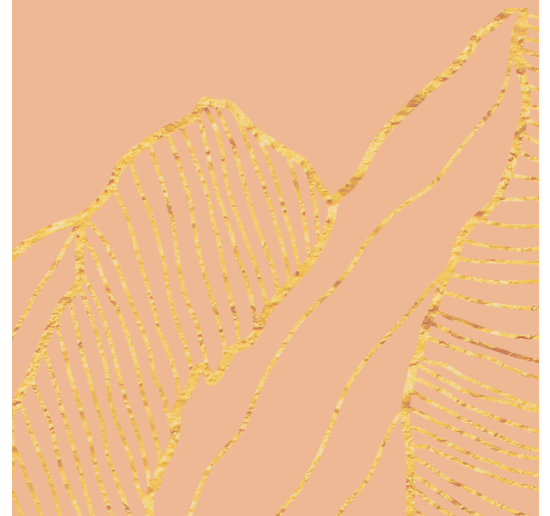
<https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/faqs/>

TIMELINE

<https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/timeline-2/>

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. To gain perspective of the immensity of the project, have students take a virtual tour <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/virtual/> of some key geographical locations along the path of the railroad.
2. Show students archival images https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/crwnap_-_images_from_the_railroad.pdf of work done on the railroad.
3. Have students keep a journal of things they notice and wonder as they view the images. Have students reflect on the challenges sojourners from China might encounter in America.



DURING DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. How is the setting an antagonist in the novel?
2. Luck is frequently mentioned in the novel. What does it mean to Wang Wei? What does it mean to Ling Fan? How do they manipulate luck to their advantage/disadvantage?
3. Compare and contrast the characters: Wang Wei/Ling Fan, Tan Din/Ling Fan's father, Ling Fan's Father/ Chin Lin Sou, Tan Din/Ah Sook, Jonathan O'Brien/Ling Fan's father.
4. How does Ling Fan change over the course of the book? What does she learn? How does she stay the same?
5. Examine the role of women in the novel.
6. Trace the evolution of Ling Fan and Wang Wei's friendship. Why does Ling Fan continue to be loyal to Wang Wei throughout most of the novel?
7. Jonathan O'Brien is revealed to be one of the saboteurs. His motivation comes from his outrage over what happened to **Indigenous peoples**. Do you think his actions are justified?
8. Compare and contrast each character's motivation for their sojourn.
9. Chin Lin Sou believes that Chinese railroad workers are "making the first tiny dents into a country that is still so new, people still don't know its true contours. Surely we can find a place in a country still trying to decide what it is." In what ways has this prediction come true? In what ways has it not?
10. Loyalty is a recurrent theme throughout the book. What does loyalty mean to Ling Fan, Wang Wei, Jonathan O'Brien?

POST READING SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Have students conduct their own research on key historical events referenced in the novel (Cape Horn, Summit Tunnel, 10 Mile Day). Did they discover discrepancies between the novel and their own research? Discuss why the author would make changes.
2. Have students choose an **oral history interview** <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/oral-history/> from **Stanford's Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project** <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/> and reflect on how the interview enhances their understanding of the Chinese experience working on the transcontinental railroad.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

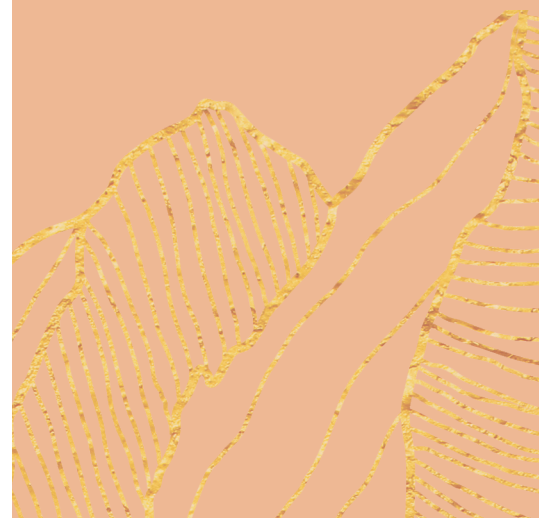
Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad Gordon H. Chang, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019

The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, editors., with Hilton Obenzinger and Roland Hsu, Stanford University Press, 2019

WEBSITES

Stanford's Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project

<http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/>



STUDENT FAQs

FAQS ABOUT CHINESE SOJOURNERS

Learn about some key points regarding the Chinese experience working on the transcontinental railroad at **Stanford's Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project** <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/faqs/> website.

Check out a **timeline** <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/timeline-2/> of the transcontinental railroad's significant events.

WHO'S WHO/WHAT'S WHAT IN GOLD MOUNTAIN

Big Four: The popularized nickname given to the financial backers of the Central Pacific Railroad. They were Leland Stanford (1824–1893), Collis Potter Huntington (1821–1900), Mark Hopkins (1813–1878), and Charles Crocker (1822–1888).

Cape Horn: A three-mile roadbed that curved along the Sierra Nevadas approximately **1,300 feet** (396 meters) above the American River. Blasting powder was used to form a ledge for the roadbed. There is some dispute as to how the work was done. A popular belief was that Chinese workers were lowered down the mountainside in baskets in order to plant charges. However, some historians disagree. See the article **here** <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/faqs/> for more information.

Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR): A rail company chartered in 1862 to build the western portion of the transcontinental railroad. It began in Sacramento, California and continued eastward through the Sierra Nevada Mountains, into Nevada and Utah.

Charles Crocker: Charles Crocker (1822–1888) was one of the “Big Four” financial backers of the Central Pacific Railroad. He served as the director of construction efforts for the Central Pacific. Charles Crocker was responsible for the hiring of tens of thousands of Chinese workers.

Doc Durant: Thomas C. Durant (1820–1885) was a physician and president of the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869. He was the key force behind pushing the Union Pacific to meet the Central Pacific in Utah.

James Strobridge: James Harvey (“Stro”) Strobridge (1827–1921) was the superintendent of construction on the Central Pacific Railroad. He lost the eyesight in his right eye in a blasting accident on the Bloomer Cut. He was resistant to working with the Chinese at first, but changed his mind after working with them. The Chinese respected him and called him the “One-Eyed Bossy Man.” He and his wife, Hannah Maria, along with their adopted children, lived temporarily in a railcar that was converted to look like a three-bedroom house on wheels during the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

Summit Tunnel: Summit Tunnel (Tunnel 6) was the longest and most arduous of the fifteen tunnels that were built in the higher elevations of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The 1,695-foot-long tunnel lay 124 feet below the surface and was cut through solid granite.

Ten Mile Day: Charles Crocker bet Thomas Durant that his crew could lay the most track in a single day. Durant's record was seven miles in a day. Crocker won the \$10,000 bet. On April 28, 1869, the workers laid ten miles and fifty-six feet of track—a record.

Union Pacific Railroad: A rail company incorporated in 1862 to build the eastern portion of the transcontinental railroad. It began in Council Bluffs, Iowa and continued westward to eventually meet the Central Pacific Railroad in Promontory Point, Utah.

CHINESE WORDS

AIYA (“eye-yah”):
an exclamation, usually of dismay

BA (“bah”):
father

BAK GUI (“bahk gwee”):
pejorative term for caucasian people

HAO (“how”):
good

GUHUN YEGUI (“goohoon yehgwee”):
literally “solitary souls” or ghosts of people who die sudden violent deaths and who did not have a proper burial

GUI (“gwee”): ghost

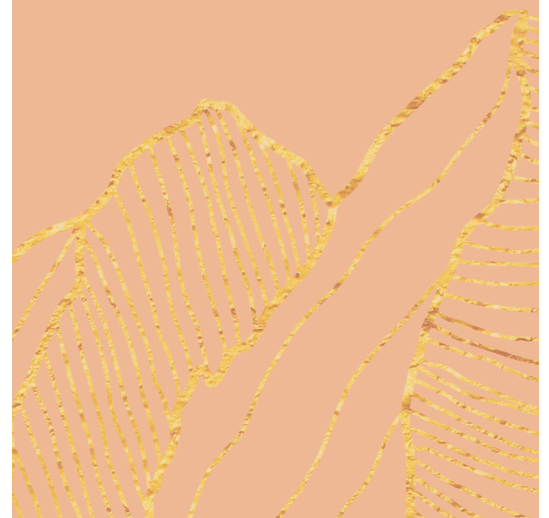
GUI JIE (“gwee jeh”):
Hungry Ghost Festival

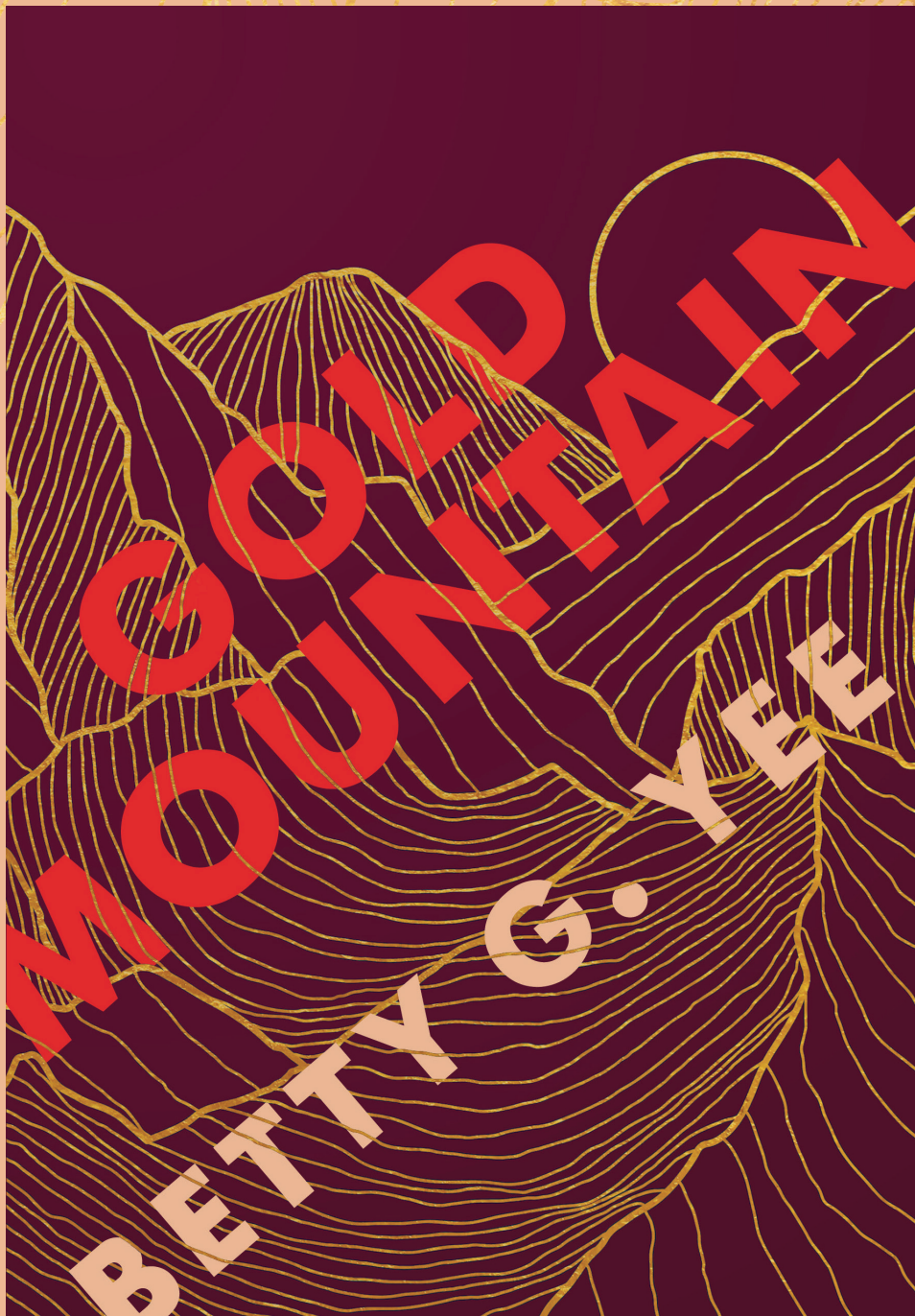
JOOK (“jokh”):
rice porridge, congee

POPO (“poh-poh”):
maternal grandmother

QINGMING (“ching-ming”):
Tomb-Sweeping Festival

WEN (“when”):
currency





Gold Mountain Ages 11-18 HC: 978-1-7284-1582-6 • \$18.99 (list) • \$14.24 (S&L)

EB: 978-1-7284-4388-1 • \$31.99 (list) • \$23.99 (S&L)



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