

Handout 1: Map of Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China



“I set the story in the 1930s because much of China was still controlled by warlords, each ruling different provinces and setting off frequent civil wars. Furthermore, the political instability was coupled with a slew of natural disasters around the country—floods, droughts, and the like—so life was very difficult and the people felt very victimized. I felt putting characters in this kind of social background served the story’s exploration of human nature.”

-- Wu Tianming, Director,

The King of Masks

Dafo (seen right) overlooks a confluence where three rivers—the Min, the Dadu, and the Qingyi—come together. This convergence of water was very dangerous and for protection, a monk name Haitong proposed construction of the giant Buddha. The red sandstone removed during the construction was deposited in the rivers, thus calming the waters. Construction took 90 years. Many temples surround the Dafo. Well over 1,000 years later, Dafo still stares out over the rivers.

Located near the city of Leshan in Sichuan Province, Dafo is today a United Nations (UNESCO) World Heritage site.



Handout 2: Reflective Writing Exercise

Reflection is thinking. A reflective paper is one where you examine, then write about yourself in relationship to some other subject. In this case, that other subject is the film *The King of Masks*. To write your reflective paper, follow the steps below.

1. Examine your response to the film. What emotions did you feel while watching this film? Were there points when you were happy? Sad? Angry? Confused? Why do you think you responded this way?
2. Did you make a connection to a character in the film? If so, which character? What personality trait might you share with this character? Or, did one of the characters remind you of someone else in your life? How is this person similar to (or different from) the character?
3. What issues, if any, did the film challenge you to think about?
4. Next, write your response. Remember, this is a reflective writing assignment, so do not summarize what happened, and don't write a movie review. Instead, write about yourself—your thoughts and emotions during and after viewing the movie.

Screening Sheet A—Find an Heir

DVD reference: Chapters 1 - 4

Part 1 – Pre-Screening Discussion

Directions: Before watching the opening scenes from *The King of Masks*, read each of the notes below. Be prepared to discuss each key point with the class.

Did you know that . . . ?

. . . a “living bodhisattva” is an enlightened being?

In Buddhism, a bodhisattva is someone who seeks knowledge and truth and whose compassion benefits humans. In China, the term was often applied to great scholars, teachers, artists, and rulers.

. . . only men performed in Chinese operas?

In the early 20th century, Chinese women of the upper classes, in particular, led very controlled lives and spent much time indoors. Social standards were such that a woman who performed on stage in public was considered immoral. As a result, men performed all the roles in Chinese operas, including female roles. The best “female impersonators” (or actors) were celebrities, what we in America today might call “superstars.” One of the most famous impersonators of the 1920s – 1930s was Mei Lanfang. Not until the 1930s were women allowed to perform in the opera. Even then, their acceptance as actors was gradual.

. . . face-changing is a traditional Chinese art form?

In ancient China, people painted their faces to drive away wild animals. Sichuan Opera absorbed this ancient skill and perfected it into an entertainment art. The “Pulling Mask” technique is the most complicated of all face-changing techniques. Performers can change as many as 10 masks in less than 20 seconds. The expression and colors of the masks represent different emotions: From green to blue, red, yellow, brown, black, and gold, these masks show fear, tension, relaxation, slyness, desperation, and outrage.

For hundreds of years, this secret art form was only passed down by family and was forbidden to female performers. However, female performers can now be seen on stage as mask change masters. All performers who are chosen to learn this art form have to swear to secrecy before they are allowed to learn even its basics. It takes them many years of hard practice to master the skill. In China, there are less than 200 artists who are able to perform “the mask change.”

. . . Chinese and European dragons are different?

In China, the dragon is a symbol of dignity and represents power and goodness—not evil as is the case with European dragons. This mythological creature even looks different. It has the body of a snake but the head of a camel, lizard legs and eagle claws, fish scales and deer horns, and even a beard!

Screening Sheet A—Find an Heir, continued

Part 2 – Screening

Directions: After viewing the scene, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Describe Bian Lian’s appearance and his behavior. How does he earn his living? State why you think he is or is not successful.
2. How does Master Liang Sulan differ from the street performer Bian Lian, both in appearance and behavior?
3. Despite their outward differences, what do these two men share in common?
4. What other characters are introduced in these opening scenes? Specifically, who is Tianci?
5. What misunderstanding occurs between Bian Lian and Master Liang?
6. What sadness does Bian Lian seem to have?
7. When Master Liang asks Bian Lian to join his artist’s troupe, the old man replies it is “like asking two peaks to merge.” What does Bian Lian mean by this figurative language?
8. Before departing the teahouse, Master Liang tells the old man, “Generals never dismount but carry on.” What does he mean by this phrase?
9. In these scenes, children are either seen or mentioned. Identify two images or references to children.
10. How do these scenes depict male children—positively, negatively or neutral? Provide a reason to support your statement.
11. How do these scenes depict female children—positively, negatively or neutral? Provide a reason to support your statement.
12. What do you think will happen next? Why?

Screening Sheet B—Children For Sale

DVD reference: Chapter 5

Part 1 – First Screening: Watching

Directions: This screening activity has two parts. In Part 1, you will watch a scene from *The King of Masks*. The scene will have no subtitles. Although very likely you will not understand the Chinese dialogue, you can still “read” the moving images and the sounds. After viewing the scene, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Describe the “marketplace.” Use specific details to capture the atmosphere.
2. What kind of people have come to this place?
3. What visual clues suggest what these characters might be feeling?
4. What happens in this scene?
5. What feelings did you experience as you watched this scene?

Part 2 – Second Screening: Seeing

Directions: You will view the same scene from the film, this time with the subtitles provided. Review the questions below so you know what to observe as you view this scene a second time. After viewing, answer the questions. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

6. How do the subtitles change your understanding of
 - (a) the marketplace?
 - (b) the people and what they are feeling?
7. Comment on the use of light and color in this scene. How do the light and colors affect how you react to what is happening?
8. Comment on the use of music in this scene. How does the soundtrack affect how you react to what is happening?



Screening Sheet C—Boss and Leech

DVD reference: Chapters 6 - 11

Part 1 – Pre-Screening Discussion

Directions: Before watching these scenes from *The King of Masks*, read each of the notes below. Be prepared to discuss each key point with the class.

... Confucius was a teacher?

Confucius was born in 551 B.C. He traveled throughout China, teaching his pupils to think for themselves and live righteously. He gave advice to rulers to care responsibly for their subjects and in exchange the subjects were to serve the ruler. Confucius did not record his ideas, but after his death his students did. His sayings became known as Confucianism, a philosophy (not a religion) that greatly influenced the Chinese way of life.

Did you know that . . . ?

... filial piety is respect and obedience to one's parent?

Confucius believed people could live together in peace and harmony if they practiced filial piety. This principle required children to obey and respect their parents. The father was the absolute ruler of the home and the family looked to him for protection and wisdom. The wife served the husband and the children served the parents.

Confucius understood, however, that not all fathers were wise. If a father betrayed his family's trust, the children had a duty to disobey or teach the father.

Being a filial son meant not only obeying one's parents but also caring for them as they aged. It also meant for a son to carry on his father's name. Therefore, for a man to die without a son was considered an offense against filial piety.



Screening Sheet C—Boss and Leech, continued

Part 2 – Screening

Directions: After viewing the scene, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Moving images *show* rather than tell. Identify an image or images that *show* the following:

- a. Bian Lian is happy to finally have an heir?
- b. Doggie has not eaten for a long time?
- c. Someone has abused Doggie?
- d. Doggie has a secret he must keep from Grandpa?

2. This sequence of scenes can be divided into two sections, scenes that come before and then after Doggie reveals the secret. Complete the chart below.

Detail	Before the secret	After the secret
Doggie's Clothing		
Bian Lian's behavior toward Doggie		
Words, phrases Bian Lian uses when speaking of Doggie		

3. After learning Doggie's secret, Bian Lian decides to abandon her. Why?

4. Bian Lian could have sold Doggie and also could have allowed Doggie to drown. Why does he not sell her and why does he rescue her?