

Handout 1: From Country Boy to Carrier Pigeon

Directions: Compare and contrast the two images below. Discuss your observations in class.



Screening Sheet A: Country Boys, City Folk

Directions: This screening activity has two parts. Your teacher will stop the DVD after each segment to allow time for you to record your observations. After viewing each segment, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Part 1—Country Boys

DVD reference: Chapters 1 – 3

The first shots of this film are close-ups of young men. Describe their appearance. Specifically, how are they different from one another?

1. In these opening shots, a voice off-screen asks the young men questions. Who is this person and what do these questions suggest about the young men and what is happening?
2. In these opening shots, the camera's focus is on the young men's faces as they answer questions. What movement is in the background?
3. As the film progresses, the scene—and the young men's appearance—changes. How and why?
4. What does the manager of the delivery company tell the young men about image?
5. During the final scenes of this segment, the camera follows one of the "carrier pigeons" as he makes his first delivery. This is Guei. How do you know that Guei is new to the city?

Part 2—City Folk

DVD reference: Chapters 4 – 6

1. These opening scenes provide the audience with a filmscape of modern-day Beijing. List the various sights and sounds the director captures in filming this sequence of Guei making his first ride through the city.
2. The opening scenes communicate much more than just what modern-day Beijing looks like, however. The scenes suggest a contrast in the lives of those who live in this city. How does Guei's friend make a living? How does his place of employment differ from the other buildings shown in these opening scenes?
3. What does Guei's friend tell him about city girls? How does his friend react to the girl in the apartment window?
4. Why does Guei think his employer's secretary has cheated him?
5. Why do you think the director included a scene with Guei's friend brushing his teeth and then giving the toothbrush to Guei? What is Guei's friend telling him?

Handout 2: The Bicycle As Status Symbol

Directions: Read the passage below. Be prepared to discuss the passage in class.

"It's often said that Americans were brought up on the rear seats of cars. It's no exaggeration to say we Chinese were brought up on the rear seats of bicycles," says Shen Zhong, a 52-year-old accountant in Beijing.

Shen remembers the first bicycle she ever owned. "It was second-hand, but it still cost me 100 yuan. My father asked his friend to fix the rattling for me. . . . My bicycle was like a family member. Life was difficult back then."

Did you know that in the year 2000, 80 percent of the people in urban areas of China used bicycles? The figures from the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that every 100 urban families had 162.7 bicycles in 2000. That figure dropped to 120 in 2005.

It was a bicycle that brought Lu Yuling and her husband together. "We lived far apart," says the retired high school teacher from Chengdu in southwest China's Sichuan Province. "It wasn't so easy to get together. He had a bike. Therefore, almost every evening, he rode all the way across the city to see me."

When Lu's boyfriend proposed marriage, he did not give her an engagement ring. Instead, he gave her a fire-engine red bicycle. "All my girlfriends were so envious of me," she says. "The bicycle was a key part of my romance and my life," says the 55-year-old Lu. "I really miss the days when the city was like a huge neighborhood, where car drivers respected cyclists and cyclists respected pedestrians."

In the 1980s and 1990s, pedaling was still a means for everyday transportation for the Chinese. Cars navigated China's city streets, but ownership of a car signaled great wealth and status. Most Chinese simply could not afford one. Throughout Shen's high school and college years, however, car ownership in China soared. In 1978 just three million vehicles were on China's roads. Today, that number is approximately 60 million, making China one of the largest auto markets in the world.

"It's so inconvenient to go downtown without a car. Both my parents and I have driver's licenses so we can make full use of the car. None of us ever rides a bike any more." --Cai Zixuan, 21

It seems that for a certain kind of affluent urban elite, the car has replaced the bicycle as the key expression of affluence, while the bicycle has now become its poor cousin, even a symbol of poverty. "This way of thinking hinders the development of the bicycle. One's use of a bicycle shouldn't be taken as an indicator of one's financial status," says Wang Fenghe.

Wang feels the media overemphasizes the glamour of the automobile at the expense of the bicycle's obvious advantages: keeping fit, safety, easy to use, zero pollution, energy-saving, cost-effectiveness and size. "These are the secrets of why the bicycle has lasted ever since its invention," says Wang. Sooner rather than later, "government and people alike, including those car owners, will realize how convenient, healthy and environmentally-friendly riding a bicycle is."

(Sources: ShanghaiDaily.com, 1-14-06, www.xinhuanet.com, posted 1-2-09)

Screening Sheet B: Parallel Storylines

Directions: This screening activity has two parts. Your teacher will stop the DVD after each segment to allow time for you to record your observations. After viewing each segment, answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Part 1—Guei’s Bicycle

DVD reference: Chapters 8 – 9

1. What complication has arisen for Guei and how does he react?
2. The secretary tells Guei to “stop crying” and that this experience will be “a lesson for you.” What does this tell you about Guei, the country boy? What does it suggest about city folk?
3. What reason does the manager of the delivery service give for firing Guei?
4. What is the manager’s opinion of Guei? Is this based on his knowledge of Guei personally or on something else?
5. How does Guei persuade the manager to give him a second chance?
6. Why is Guei’s determination to find a stolen bicycle in Beijing naïve?
7. This segment ends with a sequence of shots of Guei searching for his bicycle. Comment on how the filmmaker captures the overwhelming challenge Guei faces in order to accomplish this.

Part 2—Jian’s Bicycle

DVD reference: Chapter 10

1. The audience first sees Jian leaving school with his friends, then again at night at home with his family. Describe Jian’s behavior in these different situations. What characteristics does Jian reveal when he is with Xiao (the schoolgirl)? With his family? Alone at night in the alley?
2. One purpose for dialogue in a scene is to reveal character. There is very little dialogue in the first scene. What does this lack of dialogue suggest about the relationship between Xiao and Jian?
3. The dialogue spoken by both Jian’s friends and later his father reveals important information about Jian’s new bicycle. What is that information, and what does this suggest about how Jian got his bicycle?
4. Describe the music during the shot where Jian and Xiao are riding along the river and then again as Jian is riding home alone. How does the music suggest what Jian is feeling?
5. Why do you think the director included a scene where Jian searches for and finds a hiding place for his bicycle? What do you think the director is suggesting? When does this scene occur—before or after Jian works on his electronics?
6. Why do you think the director showed Jian awake in bed before showing him practicing stunts on the bike in the alley at night? What does this sequence suggest?
7. Why do you think the director decided to include a scene with Guei and his friend on the street at night? What does this suggest about the bicycle?

Handout 3: Beijing's Hutongs

Directions: Read the passage below. Be prepared to discuss the passage in class.

Chinese believe that in a siheyuan you can feel the spirit of the earth. Unlike in a high-rise apartment, you step on the earth every day.

-Liu Heung Shing, photojournalist

In China, a *hutong* is a residential neighborhood of narrow alleyways or lanes. The alleys are formed by *siheyuans*, or housing compounds, that connect one to another. The result is a sort of maze or labyrinth of cobblestoned lanes.

In Beijing, hutongs once numbered in the thousands. However, in recent years, the houses in many hutongs have been pulled down and replaced by modern buildings. Many hutong dwellers have moved to new housing. However, in the urban district of Beijing houses along hutongs still occupy one third of the total area, providing housing for half the population. A tour of Beijing's hutongs is a journey into the past, an opportunity to see the old life within modern-day China.

(Source: China Virtual Tours, www.chinavista.com/experience/hutong/hutong.html)

A stroll through one of this city's labyrinthine *hutongs* . . . offers glimpses of a back street life mostly hidden behind the gray walls on either side: chain-smoking old men sitting at a checkerboard, a workman intent on a lunch of steamed dumplings, a cobbler hunched over a pair of worn canvas shoes. Occasionally an open door reveals a warren of cramped passageways or a courtyard packed with battered bicycles, caged songbirds and clothes hung out to dry in the hazy sunlight.

(Source: "In Ancient Alleys, Modern Comforts," *New York Times*, 7-24-08)



Screening Sheet C: The Bicycle Thief

DVD reference: Chapters 12 – 15

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

1. Guei's determination has paid off. Still, even after a collision with a truck and a near brawl in the alleyway, he does not have his bike. How does the filmmaker suggest that he is not going to give up?
2. What is the meaning or significance of the scene between Jian and Xiao in the arcade? How does this change your understanding of Jian's character?
3. What is the meaning or significance of the scene between Jian and his father? How does this change your understanding of Jian's character?
4. In the classroom after school, Xiao tries to comfort Jian by telling him "It's just a bike" and that he can "buy another." What does the audience suspect that Xiao does not?
5. How has Xiao insulted Jian, though perhaps not on purpose?
6. What does Jian's reaction to Xiao in the classroom suggest about what he is thinking or feeling?
7. In this sequence of scenes, Jian's sister appears twice. Why do you think the filmmaker included the sister in these scenes? What might the filmmaker be suggesting about the brother-sister relationship?