



THE TRUTH ABOUT DRAGONS

ACTIVITY KIT

ABOUT THE BOOK

A Caldecott Honor Winner

Winner of the Asian Pacific American Award for Literature

An unforgettable lyrical picture book that celebrates biracial identity from the award-winning author of *Paper Son: The Inspiring Story of Tyrus Wong, Immigrant and Artist*.

*Lean in close,
my darling bao bei,
and I will whisper
a most precious secret
about a powerful magic
that lives inside you.*

Brought to life with lavish and ornate illustrations, *The Truth About Dragons* follows a young child on a journey guided by his mother's bedtime storytelling. He quests into two very different forests, as his two grandmothers help him discover two different, but equally enchanting, truths about dragons.

Eastern and Western mythologies coexist and enrich each other in this warm celebration of mixed cultural identity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Julie Leung was raised in the sleepy suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia, though it may be more accurate to say she grew up in Oz and came of age in Middle-earth. By day, she is the Marketing Director for Random House's sci-fi/fantasy imprint, Del Rey Books. By night, she writes to calm the ghosts from the past. In her free time, she enjoys furtively sniffing books at bookstores and winning at obscure board games. Her favorite mode of transportation is the library. She currently resides in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband and many untold stories.

Hanna Cha is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. She spent her childhood in both Korea and America, and currently lives in Boston where she loves crinkling her nose in the early morning breeze and snuggling her tiger-like cat, Hobac. She is the author and illustrator of *Tiny Feet Between the Mountains*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Before my first son was born, my husband and I debated whose last name to give him. His being so American, it's ubiquitous with a popular soup brand. And mine? Harder to pronounce, harder to spell, and obviously Chinese.

Despite our commitment to raise him as a family of blended cultures, one that celebrates Mid-Autumn Festival as much as Halloween, we can't escape the fact that there will be times when our children will be pressured to pick one identity over the other.

How could I help him embrace his two cultural heritages in equal measure? As a huge fan of fantasy fiction and folklore, I've always loved dragons of every interpretation. And a natural metaphor emerged out of the fact that the Eastern and Western versions of this mythical creature differ so greatly. This book is my exploration of how two cultural birthrights can exist in parallel harmony and how much richer one's adventures will be when there's not one but many truths about dragons to discover.

—*Julie Leung*



ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTE

As also a voyager of both worlds and cultures (for me I straddle between Korea and America) *The Truth About Dragons* story reminded me of my experience of navigating my cultural heritage.

Because of this, when illustrating, I wanted to make sure that Bao Bei's forests and dragons are as magical and beautiful as possible. Everyone's cultural journey will be different and no matter how they decide to explore, every journey will be worth celebrating. I only hope this book will be a little beacon to help little adventures (or big adventures!) find their truths about dragons.

—*Hanna Cha*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- You may often hear people describe themselves, or others, as fractions of a whole—e.g. “I’m half this,” or “a quarter that”. How might such language work against feelings of fully belonging to a culture or ethnicity?
- Eastern and Western dragons are both depicted as legendary creatures of great power, but how do they differ in the roles they play in their respective cultures?
- The protagonist’s two journeys result in two very different truths. How might one learn to adapt and/or find harmony with disparate, even opposing, elements of our identity?
- The two wise women in the book are revealed to be the protagonist’s grandmothers. How do intergenerational relationships affect identities?

HIDE AND SEEK

You meet the dragons early in one of the pages. Can you spot it?

Can you find the hidden animals and gnomes in the forest?

At the end of the book, you see there is a jade bracelet and a ruby brooch on the nightstand. Can you find them earlier in the book?

At the end of the book, who do you notice in the photo on the nightstand table? Do these two figures look familiar?

When you look at the book, on the top edges you can see blue scales and on the bottom edges of the book you can see red scales. See what is hiding behind the jacket cover!

FUN FACTS

The style of art changes from two journeys. Illustrator Hanna Cha used completely different pens (ink nibs for Western culture, calligraphy brush for Eastern culture) to achieve the two styles.

The journey into the oak forest is heavily inspired by European folklore, including mentions of will o’ wisps, trolls, and references to the Baba Yaga motif of Slavic folklore.

The journey into the bamboo forest is modeled after xian xia, a genre of Chinese fantasy tales that deal with immortal beings and gods. It includes mentions of Chang’e, the moon goddess, and shapeshifting foxes who appear in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean folktales under various names.

On the spread with the moon goddess Chang’e, there are additional details of their mythology on the cloth around the moon goddess.

On the spread where you first see the blue dragon fully, you can spot the moon goddess Changè and the sun goddess Xihe.