



## ABRIDGED MIDDLE READER LESSON PLAN

*A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat

GUIDED ANTI-BIAS/ANTI-RACIST READING | GRADES 4+



## **INTRODUCTION**

This lesson is divided into 4 sections that are designed to follow along with the book *A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat. Written by Zapoura Newton-Calvert, each section focuses on reading comprehension, critical thinking, and self-reflection based on the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards. We provide discussion questions, reflection prompts, and activities as guides.

## **CHECK OUT OR PURCHASE THE BOOK**

Find the book at your local library, or purchase the book from the [Reading Is Resistance Book Shop](#). 10% commission goes back into our organization for operating costs, and another 10% is donated to independent bookstores.

## **OBJECTIVES**

This guided reading lesson is designed to be part of a larger life-long commitment to anti-racist teaching and learning for the student and the facilitator. Reading Is Resistance sees reading as an opportunity to seed deeper conversations and opportunities for action around racial equity in our communities. We hold the belief that being anti-racist is a process of learning (and unlearning) over time.

The [Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards](#) (focused on Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action) serve as guides for our work.



## SECTION ONE: PP 1-87

### **SUMMARY**

Pong and Somkit are 9-year-old boys who are more like brothers than friends. They grow up in a Thailand inspired, magical world, captive on the island that holds Namwon Prison because their mothers gave birth while incarcerated there.

Everything changes for Pong when a visit from the Governor, admired for giving the city of Chattana magical light, reveals that he is not the hero he was thought to be.

Pong escapes and finds himself taken in by Father Cham and living in a monastery where he is certain he'll live undiscovered until the prison warden and his daughter Nok appear at the monastery gates and the threat of being found out becomes very real.

### **SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION**

- ❑ Let's talk about Pong/Somkit and Nok are affected by where they are born (the physical location) and to whom they are born (their mothers). What do you notice? What does this make you think about? What feelings are coming up for you? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #14**
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## SECTION TWO: PP 88-183

### **SUMMARY**

In this section of the book, we learn out more about who Nok is, what she believes, and what makes her start to have doubts about her worldview.

At the monastery, Pong gets a final blessing from Father Cham, and in the marketplace, Nok finally recognizes Pong as the runaway from the prison. Nok tries to catch Pong in order to restore her family's reputation, but he narrowly escapes and clings onto a barge that is headed to Chattana.

With their reputation as upholders of the law sullied once again, Nok's family decides to head back to the city. Nok's mother asks her/orders her to stay and attend the village school, but Nok has other plans.

### **SAMPLE REFLECTION QUESTION**

- ❑ When Pong arrives in Chattana, we learn more about which people can buy which magical orbs (p. 120). What do we find out? How does this make you feel? Can you imagine other ways that the Governor could use his magical gift in the city? Is the way he is using it the only way? **RADICAL IMAGINATION**



## SECTION THREE: PP 184-276

### SUMMARY

Pong is reunited with Somkit and living in a bustling communal space for those with few monetary resources.

After seeing firsthand that the system of light orbs and advantages that the Governor has in place is unfair, much like the justice system, he agrees to support Somkit and Ampai who are planning a peaceful protest.

Pong realizes Nok is close and makes plans to head to sea. Somkit gets wind of this and won't let him leave alone. The two get caught by police and thrown in a horse stall...where they surprisingly also encounter Nok, who has been imprisoned for challenging the Governor and his beliefs.

### SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ☐ Describe the moment when Nok's understanding of justice and doing the "right" thing finally changes in a big way. **DIVERSITY DOMAIN #10**
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## SECTION FOUR: PP 277-END

### SUMMARY

When Mud House burns in a terrible fire, the community decides to proceed with their peaceful march. They come together to remake the golden orbs, and Nok, Somkit, and Pong all have the opportunity to dig deep to show what they really believe and stand for.

### SAMPLE DISCUSSION QUESTION

- ☐ What does this book teach us about how to make change even when it seems impossible? How might this teach us something that we can keep in mind when we want to take action for things we believe in? **ACTION DOMAIN #20**

## What's Next?

### RESOURCES

Included with full-length lesson plan

### WRITING PROMPTS

Included with full-length lesson plan

- ☐ Example: Personal Essay Prompt
- ☐ Example: Compare and Contrast Essay Prompt

### READ NEXT

*A Wish in the Dark* by  
Christina Soontornvat

*Bayou Magic* by  
Jewell Parker Rhodes

*Ghost Squad* by  
Claribel A. Ortega

*The Way to Rio Luna*  
by Zoraida Cordova

