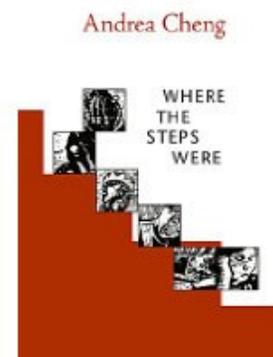


Where the Steps Were by Andrea Cheng A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

About the Book

Class with Miss D. gives the students at Pleasant Hill Elementary in inner-city Cincinnati the confidence they need to move on to their new school. The third-graders are sad that this will be their last year at Pleasant Hill before the school is torn down. Poems narrated in the voices of five students provide a series of snapshots of the lives of children in an inner-city school. Dawn is plump, and fearful of her volatile father. Kayla can't read, and her brother is in jail. Carmen's mother smokes like a chimney. Anthony shows up early every morning to help Miss D. Jonathan lives with his mother and little brother in a homeless shelter.



They all know that at the end of the year, their school will close, and what little stability they have becomes all the more precious to them. The poems relate the events of their last year together with their teacher, Miss D. The year is busy as the students, each facing a challenge at home, prepare to put on a play, take field trips to a local farm, and do experiments in the science lab. They also are studying the Civil War and key figures in the civil rights movement. When the students go to a play in a real theater, they are falsely accused of spitting from a theater balcony and are kicked out. Miss D., who instills in them a strong sense of justice, helps the students write letters to the theater manager, demanding to know why they weren't allowed to see the play. Is it because their skin is black?

The free-verse poems give voice to the children, allowing them to speak their hopes, frustrations and fears. Cheng's powerful, blocky woodcuts accompany the poems, intensifying their emotional impact. The poems also pay tribute to hard-working educators and children learning to overcome obstacles and accept unwelcome changes.



Photograph Used With Permission
from Andrea Cheng

About the Author

Andrea Cheng teaches English as a Second Language in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she lives with her husband and their three children. She is the daughter of Hungarian Jewish immigrants and grew up among extended family members, many of whom survived the Holocaust. Ms. Cheng attended Cornell University where she studied intensive Chinese. She then married a Chinese American, himself the son of immigrants. Ms. Cheng and her husband settled in Cincinnati in the inner city. Their children, ages 19, 21, and 23, went to Cincinnati Public Schools and are now in Boston and San Francisco.

Ms. Cheng says of **Where the Steps Were**:

*"My sister teaches third grade in the inner city in Cincinnati, Ohio. We live around the block from each other and also very close to the school. Every day I heard stories of her students. I also went to help out often in her classroom, and soon I began to hear the voices of her students in my head. There was Anthony who loved to be helpful, and Jonathan who was fascinated by electricity. Then there were three girls, Carmen, Kayla, and Dawn, each with their own fears and hopes and dreams. My sister became 'Miss D.' in **Where the Steps Were**, and her students became the voices of the five children as they progressed through the school year."*

Andrea Cheng is a published author of children's and young adult books. Her published credits include picture books—**Anna the Bookbinder**, **Grandfather Counts**, **Goldfish and Chrysanthemums**, **Shanghai Messenger**, **The Lemon Sisters**, **Tire Mountain** and **When the Bees Fly Home**; middle grade novels--**The Key Collection**, **Eclipse**, **Honeysuckle House**, **Where the Steps Were**, **The Bear Makers** and **The Lace Dowry**; and her young adult novel **Marika**.



Author Resources:

Andrea Cheng's official website

<http://www.andreacheng.com/>

CET Connect Video for Cincinnati Book Festival

<http://www.cetconnect.org/MediaPlayer.aspx?vid=1706&topic=0>

Cincinnati Educational Television interview with Ms. Cheng

Teachers I Remember by Robin Smith

http://www.hbook.com/magazine/articles/2008/sep08_smith.asp

The Horn Book magazine article related to **Where The Steps Were**

Interview with writer Andrea Cheng

http://www.papertigers.org/interviews/archived_interviews/acheng.html

By Aline Pereira at PaperTigers.org

Information for Teachers from Andrea Cheng

<http://www.andreacheng.com/teachers>

Includes a video and lesson plan about **Where the Steps Were**

Where The Steps Were book summary and review

http://www.andreacheng.com/books/middle_grade_novel/wherethestepswere



Discussion Questions

Before Reading

Have a class discussion on what you would do if your school was being demolished. Where would you go to school? What problems might there be in attending a new school? What would happen to your favorite teachers?

After Reading

1. Why do you think the author decided to have five characters to narrate the novel? The author also uses poetry to tell this story. Why do you think she picked this format? What does it add to the narrative?
2. What do you learn about the characters in the book? Describe one of them and the realities of his or her life. Compare them to your own. How would you cope under his or her circumstances?
3. The children are comfortable in their school. How will things change when they go to a new school? Can kids be given the same opportunities for education and success?
4. Describe Dawn's relationship with her father. Do you consider the way he treats her abusive? Is there a line between discipline and abuse? Does Dawn have someone who she can talk with about the problems at home?
5. Kayla cannot read. What kind of help would you suggest that Kayla seek so that she can learn to read?
6. Carmen is concerned about her mother's smoking problem. What could Carmen do to encourage her mother not to smoke?
7. Anthony lives in a homeless shelter. Research how many homeless people live in your community. What is being done to help them?



Extension Projects

Health

Research the effects of smoking on a person's body. Prepare a poster which would encourage people not to smoke.

Language Arts

Write a letter from one character to the theater manager asking why the children were asked to leave. Be sure to stay "in character" as you write and explore the relationships that make up this story.

Library skills

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is located in Cincinnati. Check the Museum website and its areas of specialization. Write a report to share with your classmates.

Math

Compile a listing of the social and economic characteristics of the five children. Compare them to what you think America's "haves" possess. Create a bar or pie graph comparing each group's access to education, health care, nutrition, and housing.

History

Just as the students in Mrs. D's class studied the Civil War, research what part Cincinnati and Ohio played in the Civil War and the Underground Railroad. Write a report on either topic.



Additional Resources

Websites

Author Visit Preparation

http://www.andreacheng.com/sites/default/files/presentations_prepare.pdf

Includes ideas for all of Ms. Cheng's books, including ***Where The Steps Were***, to prepare students for an author visit.

Ohio Historical Society Underground Railroad Information Station

<http://www.ohiohistory.org/undergroundrr/>

Links to pages featuring archival and artifact collections, information for kids and teachers, places to visit and exhibits to discover.

Poetry Resources from Scholastic

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/index.htm>

Includes webcasts with famous children's poets.

Where The Steps Were lesson plans

<http://www.andreacheng.com/sites/default/files/Lesson%20Plans%20Steps.pdf>

Five lesson plans for use with ***Where The Steps Were***

Books

Pass the Poetry Please by Lee Bennet Hopkins

Recognizing children's natural delight in rhyme and wordplay, poet and teacher Lee Bennett Hopkins suggests ways for educators to use nursery rhymes, jump-rope jingles, and songs as springboards to the enjoyment of poetry.

Spin a Soft Black Song by Nikki Giovanni and George Martins

A favorite collection of thirty-five poems for and about black children celebrates the energy and joy of life.

Book details:

Where the Steps Were by Andrea Cheng.

Wordsong, 2008. Grades 3-6. ISBN-13: 978-1932425888.

About Choose to Read Ohio

Choose to Read Ohio (CTRO) spotlights Ohio authors and promotes reading across Ohio. The State Library of Ohio, in partnership with Ohioana Library Association, developed this initiative to encourage Ohioans of all ages to share literature by authors native to, residing in, or associated with Ohio. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: <http://oh.webjunction.org/ohctrointro>.