

DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS: An Encounter with Zhu Qizhan

by Terrence Cheng

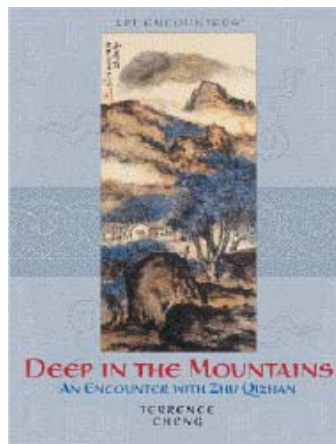
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Teacher's/Reading Guide

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The questions that follow are intended to enhance your group's reading and discussion of Terrence Cheng's second novel, **DEEP IN THE MOUNTAINS**, a beautiful, haunting story of growing up and accepting life's challenges—and its joys.

When Tony Cheung, a 15 year-old Chinese boy, is kicked out of his Bronx high school for spray painting a teacher's car, his parents send him to Shanghai to spend the summer working in his uncle's restaurant. In Shanghai he befriends the great Chinese artist Zhu Qizhan.

Zhu Qizhan was born in 1892 and lived to be 105 years old. During his life, Zhu witnessed the Boxer Rebellion, the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, the Sino-Japanese War, Japan's occupation of China during World War II, and was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution—a remarkable life filled with struggle, love, conflict, and always, art.

With the help of Master Zhu's stories and lessons, Tony learns about Chinese painting and history, but most importantly he learns how to approach his work and life with dignity, honor, and integrity.

QUESTIONS:

1. Tony's life as a Chinese-American is complicated by peer pressure at school, as well as his parents' expectations of him. Which do you think is the more powerful influence on Tony, and to what result?
2. Tony blames many of his problems on his parents and upbringing—do you agree with him? How much of Tony's conflict can be attributed to his parents and the struggle of being immigrants, and how much is simply a part of growing up in America?
3. It is no secret that people—and especially kids—can be vicious and cruel to each other. In light of this fact, discuss prejudice and racism as a factor in Tony's conflict. Is the abuse he takes at school primarily a product of racism and stereotypes, or is it (once again) simply a part of growing up?

4. When Tony arrives in Shanghai, he experiences an enormous culture shock. In the book, what are the biggest differences you can see between Shanghai and New York? Have you ever personally experienced such a culture shock? Describe your experience in detail and compare it to Tony's.
5. Tony's uncle is both likable and dislikable for a multitude of reasons. Discuss the pros and cons of Tony's uncle's role in the book: In what way is he a positive influence on Tony, and in what ways negative?
6. Master Zhu was one of China's most famous painters who lived for more than a century (1892-1996). Name three other painters from the U.S., Europe, or anywhere around the world who lived and worked during Master Zhu's time.
7. Do some research on the historical events in Chinese history that Master Zhu lived through, particularly the Sino-Japanese War and Japan's occupation of China during World War II; and the Cultural Revolution. From what Master Zhu describes in the book, which historical event do you think had the greatest impact on him as a man and as an artist, and how could things have turned out differently for him?
8. In Chapter 11, Master Zhu explains to Tony the difference between Eastern and Western painting. Go to the library or look online for work by famous painters from both the East and West. Are there any *other* differences that you can see between the two philosophies and techniques? Which do you prefer—Eastern or Western painting—and why?
9. While in Shanghai, Tony learns not only about Chinese painting and Chinese history, but about his own family's history as well. Make a list of things you know about your family, and a list of things that you don't know that you would like to ask someone about. Do you think immigrants in the U.S. reveal more or less about their family background and heritage? Under what circumstances?
10. In the end, what do you think Tony learns from his uncle (both good and bad), and does his uncle learn anything from living and working with Tony?
11. What is the most important lesson that Tony learns from Master Zhu? And what, if anything, did you find most inspirational about Master Zhu and his work?
12. What do you think Tony will do with his life after college? Write the epilogue.

About the Author

Terrence Cheng is the author of two novels, *Sons of Heaven* and *Deep in the Mountains*. Born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1972, Cheng came to the United States with his family in 1973. He earned his BA in English at Binghamton University (SUNY), and his MFA in Fiction at the University of Miami, FL, where he was a James Michener Fellow. In 2005 Cheng received a Literature Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He is currently Assistant Professor of English and Creative Writing at Lehman College, part of the City University of New York. He lives with his wife in New York City. For more information visit www.tcheng.net.