

Reader's Guide  
For  
*Dragon Wishes*  
by  
Stacy A. Nyikos  
A Debut Middle Grade Novel

About the Book

Eleven-year-old Alex is searching. So is Shin Wa. They both need to find a path out of the darkness that surrounds them. Shin Wa's journey leads her to the Black mountains of the far north in China. There she discovers more than just the last surviving dragons. She finds a way to save mankind. It all lies in a single pearl of wisdom. The gem is also the key to Alex's own journey. The pearl travels through the ages to find the struggling young girl and her sister. But it is not until Alex discovers how to use the pearl that she finds her way out of the darkness.

About the Author

Author, Stacy A. Nyikos, loves to travel. Her characters do too. Her award-winning picture book, *Shelby*, plunges readers deep under the ocean into the mysterious world of sharks. *Dragon Wishes*, her debut middle grade novel, flies them high above the earth and into the mythical world of Chinese dragons. And her current project, *Euromutt*, whisks even the most timid traveler far across the ocean and into foreign lands. When she isn't traveling—either through her imagination or around the globe—Stacy lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with her two daughters and husband.

Discussion Questions

1. There are two heroes in this story, Alex and Shin Wa. But they do very different things. In your opinion how are Alex and Shin Wa similar? How are they different?
2. Alex cannot talk about the death of her parents. It is too big for her. In fact, it actually becomes a character, IT. When Alex finally talks about IT, that character becomes weaker. Why? How can talking about important issues in your life change them?
3. If enough people recognize an object as standing for something, a symbol is born. In this story, a pearl represents wisdom. What are some other symbols in our culture? How are symbols born?
4. Isa is a supporting character, but she doesn't say anything until almost the end of the book. Can a silent character be as strong as one who talks? Explain.
5. The dragon story takes place thousands of years ago and seems very far away from our lives today—for instance, we don't have to find dragons to help people stop fighting. But people still fight each other today.

Activity

When I was young, I was always trying to come up with new ways to make money. In *Dragon Wishes*, Alex and Maddie come up with the idea to paint people's faces at the soccer games to earn money. Can your class come up with a fun activity you can do to earn money for the class? Once you've come up with it, try it out. Use the money from your activity to buy books for the class, take a field trip, or have a class party. See how creative you can get!

## Carve it Yourself

Tired of signing your name? Want to add a little art to your signature? This activity is just the thing. It shows you how to make your very own, one of a kind, Chinese seal.

### **Materials:**

1) A one to two-inch block of soft clay.

NOTE: Air-drying clay can be used, but baking clay is a little firmer and easier to handle.

2) A sharpened pencil.

3) Tracing paper.

4) A name or image.

5) Ink pad.

### **Instructions:**

1) Trace the name or image on tracing paper.

2) Go over it a few times until it is dark with the lead from the pencil.

3) Place the traced image face down on one side of the clay. This is called the chop.

4) Press down firmly so that the image on the tracing paper imprints on the clay and then remove. If you are using your name, like BELLA, it will leave an image that looks like

this: **BELLA**

IMPORTANT: The image must be in reverse on the seal so that it prints facing the right way on paper.

5) Using the sharpened end of the pencil, carve the backwards image into the clay.

6) Now comes the hard part, waiting. The clay must be completely dry before the seal can be used. If it is not, the clay will absorb the ink and that makes it hard to use the seal with any other color.

TIP: If you are using air-drying clay, it can take up to a week to dry. If you are using baking clay, it usually takes about 20 minutes to bake. Then the clay has to cool, which takes around an hour.

7) Once the seal has dried and cooled, it's time to test it out.

8) Press the chop side of the seal into the ink pad.

9) Remove and blow a quick breath of hot air onto the inked chop. Sometimes ink clumps up on the seal. Hot air warms the ink and helps to spread it evenly across the seal.

10) Press the inked chop onto a piece of absorbent paper, like regular printer paper.

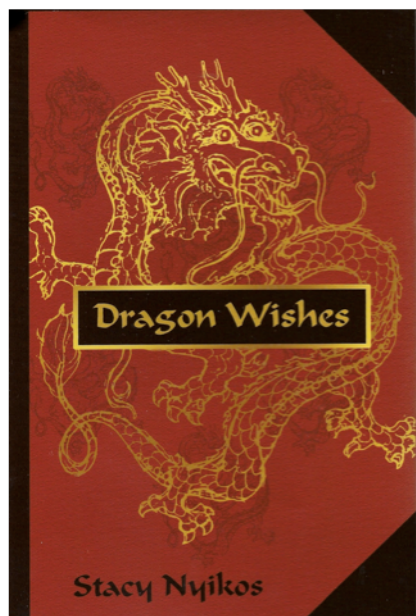
NOTE: Paper that is shiny or has a waxy finish like magazine paper will not absorb the ink.

11) Remove the seal and *Presto!* Your very own, one-of-a-kind, seal.

This seal is called an intaglio seal. The stamping image is carved into the seal.

Intaglio seals produce white images on ink-colored backgrounds.

If you want to take your carving skills a step further, try making a relief seal. Instead of carving the image into the clay, carefully carve the background away so that the image rises above the surface of the seal. The result is an ink-colored image on a white background. It takes patience and a steady hand. Try it out and see what you can do.



*Dragon Wishes*  
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ISBN: 978-1-933831-11-4

Publication  
Date: November 2008

Publisher: Blooming Tree Press  
PO Box 140934  
Austin, TX 78714

General Phone Number:  
Blooming Tree Press  
512-921-8846

Availability:

Baker & Taylor  
Ingram  
NBN  
Blooming Tree Press

Reviews:

Midwest Book Review  
Lost in the Review (online)  
BookMuncher (online)

Awards: San Francisco Book Festival Award  
Silver Recipient  
Nautilus Book Award  
Silver Recipient

Tie-in Articles:

"Move Over John Hancock, Here Comes the Seal"  
Purchased by *Highlights Magazine for Children*,  
March 2009

Conferences where the book has been presented:

Louisiana Librarians Midwinter Conference 2008  
New Mexico Librarians Conference 2008  
Texas Library Association Conference 2008  
California Library Association Conference 2008  
National Conference for Teachers of English 2008  
Virginia Festival of the Book 2009  
Oklahoma EncycloMedia 2008 & 2009

Sample AR Questions:

- 1) Where are Alex and her little sister Isa from?
  - A. California
  - B. Oregon
  - C. Kansas
  - D. Oklahoma**
  - E. Nevada
  
- 2) What does Shin Wa use to summon the dragons?
  - A. A cypress branch**
  - B. Ornamental firecrackers
  - C. A pearl of wisdom
  - D. Her heart
  - E. Fire
  
- 3) What does Alex steal from Auntie Ling?
  - A. A gold bracelet
  - B. Her computer
  - C. A pair of dragon earrings
  - D. A pearl pendant**
  - E. Her car
  
- 4) How do the dragons and Shin Wa return to Shin Wa's village?
  - A. They march along the road at night
  - B. They swim up the river
  - C. They travel through the forest
  - D. They travel through underground tunnels
  - E. They fly**
  
- 5) When Alex gives her art report, she invites a surprise guest for Auntie Ling. Who is it?
  - A. Mr. Rivera
  - B. Principal Shumi
  - C. Shen Po Po**
  - D. Shin Wa
  - E. Her parents