

Classroom Resources



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Be Careful, Xiao Xin!

Alice Pung and Sher Rill Ng

BOOK SUMMARY

From bestselling author Alice Pung and renowned illustrator Sher Rill Ng comes an extraordinarily powerful and moving book about how the past can shape the future.

Xiao Xin believes he is a Red Fire Warrior but his family are always telling him to be careful. They believe the world is a dangerous place. Too dangerous for a little boy on his own.

*They don't understand what I can do!
They don't understand what I can be!*

Renowned storytellers Alice Pung and Sher Rill Ng bring to life a beautiful and tender story about learning to conquer your own fears – as a child, and as an adult.

KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

- ACELT1608
- ACELT1610
- ACELY1702

THEMES

- Families
- Migration & Refugees
- Belonging
- Identity
- Health and Wellbeing

Recommended Reading Ages: 4+
(This book is appropriate for study to Senior Secondary.)

Resources Created For: Upper Primary

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Note to educators:

Be Careful, Xiao Xin! is a bilingual text written in both English and Simplified Chinese. While this teaching resource engages with the use of Chinese text, it concentrates on the English text, along with the illustrations. This is a reflection of the experience and expertise of the creator of this teaching resource.

Before Reading

1. Have a look at the front cover:
 - a. You may notice that there appear to be two people on the cover, although one is the reflection of the other. What do you think this may mean?
 - b. It also appears as though the title, *Be Careful, Xiao Xin!* is reflected in the water, but as Chinese characters. What might this tell you about how the book is written?
 - c. Which two colours are most prominent on the cover?
 - What do these two colours mean by themselves?
 - What might they mean when used together?
2. Read the blurb on the back cover.
3. Using all of the information you have gathered from studying the cover, what do you think this book will be about (discuss the themes as well as the content)?

During Reading

Colour

1. When you examined the front cover of the text, you identified two prominent colours. What are they?
2. Xiao Xin wears one of these colours but is most at home in the other. What do you think this use of colour is trying to tell us about Xiao Xin?
 - a. The shade of blue in which Xiao Xin feels most at home is what the illustrator has called midnight blue. Why do you think it is this quite dark shade of blue that makes him feel so at home?
3. The pages of the book where Xiao Xin's family appears feature a shade of yellow which is described as sickly.
 - a. What is the effect of this colour on the atmosphere in these scenes?
 - b. Why do you think this colour is NOT present in the scenes that do not include Xiao Xin's grandparents, parents and aunt?
 - c. Does the use of this colour change over the course of *Be Careful, Xiao Xin!*?

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Angles and gaze

1. When we first meet Xiao Xin on the opening spread, we see him from quite a high angle, which would normally indicate that he has little power. However, his gaze is quite direct to the reader, which suggests that he is not afraid of us looking at him. What effect does this create for the reader?
2. The image from the opening spread is very similar to spread 13, however the combination of text with the slight differences in the image have created a very different atmosphere. How would you describe the tone of this image?
3. On spread 14, the angle of the image is reversed to that of spread 13 when Xiao Xin 'becomes' the Red Fire Warrior.
 - a. Describe the expression on the Red Fire Warrior's face.
 - b. How does the combination of gaze, angle and facial expression change the tone of the book?

Symbolism

1. Xiao xin means 'be careful' in Chinese. Xiao Xin has heard this phrase so often, that he now thinks it's his name. This is reflected on spread 9 where his family are calling out "Xiao Xin!" but there is no Chinese translation. How might hearing the phrase 'be careful' so often make you feel?
2. On spread 7, Xiao Xin tells us, "They call me Xiao Xin – Little Heart – because I am little on the outside". The Chinese characters that make up the words xiao xin or be careful, can also be read as 'little heart'. What do you think the author is trying to tell the English reader by letting us know this dual meaning for xiao xin?
 - a. Which interpretation of 'xiao xin' do you think is most appropriate for the main character? Explain your answer with reference to the text.
3. Also on spread 7, Xiao Xin tells us that on the inside, "...I am a Red Fire Warrior."
 - a. How has reflection been used to show who Xiao Xin believes he truly is?
 - b. Why do you think the text has also been reflected on this spread?
 - c. Reflections and shadows have been used at several points throughout the text. Find other examples of reflections and explain why the illustrator has used this technique.
4. Throughout *Be Careful, Xiao Xin!* we see shadow monsters looming over the family or lurking in the hallways. What do you think these monsters might represent?
 - a. The size of these monsters reflects the size of the fear or worry that each member of the family has. Can you identify which worry monster belongs to which member of the family?
 - b. On spread 17 we are shown the origin of three of Xiao Xin's family members' worry monster. Where have their worries and fears come from?
 - c. What effect do these creatures have on the tone of the scene when they appear? Choose two different spreads and explain how they affect the atmosphere.
 - d. On the final spread, we see that both the worry monsters and the sickly yellow colour associated with Xiao Xin's family have disappeared. Why do you think this might have happened?

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5. Xiao Xin undertakes several physical transformations throughout *Be Careful, Xiao Xin!*.
 - a. Describe Xiao Xin's appearance on spread 2.
 - b. On spread 8, Xiao Xin begins to change. Describe what he looks like now.
 - i. What do you think is causing this change?
 - ii. How might helping his little sister help Xiao Xin to become more confident?
 - c. By spread 12, Xiao Xin has finished transforming into a boy rather than a small child.
 - i. Which appearance do you think is a true reflection of what Xiao Xin looks like?
 - ii. Why do you think the illustrator has included the other version of his appearance?
 - d. On spread 14, we see how Xiao Xin sees himself. Why do you think Xiao Xin is only able to become his 'true self' when he is outside, at night, on his own?

After Reading

Written responses to the text

1. In the end it is Xiao Xin's relationship with his sister that enables him to find a sense of peace, and for his family to find a sense of peace in allowing the children to make mistakes.
 - a. Examine the interactions between Xiao Xin and Fan Xin on spreads 8, 19, 20, 21 & 22. What can these tell us about their relationship, and how it might help to ease the fears of the rest of the family?
2. Fan Xin means (loosely translated) 'be at ease' in Chinese and is seen as meaning the opposite to 'be careful'. Explain, with reference to the text, why you believe the author has given Xiao Xin's little sister this name.
3. For Xiao Xin's family, being careful is intertwined with love. How is this portrayed in the text?

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About the Creators

Alice Pung is a Melbourne-based author whose award-winning books include *Unpolished Gem*, *Her Father's Daughter* and *Laurinda*. She also wrote the Marly books for the Our Australian Girl series and edited *Growing Up Asian in Australia*. Her most recent book *One Hundred Days* was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award. In 2022, she was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for her services to Australian literature. Visit alicepung.net to find out more.

Sher Rill Ng is a Melbourne-based author and illustrator. She graduated from RMIT with a Bachelor of Design and works as a web and mobile UX/UI designer. She took part in the Imaginism In-House Workshop, an intensive art training program in Montreal, Canada, working with leading artists in the concept art/animation industry. Her works have been shown in numerous exhibitions, including the Light Grey Art Lab (Minnesota) and Gallery 1988 (Los Angeles). Sher Rill's debut picture book, *Our Little Inventor*, was followed by contributing Thumbelina's illustrations to the anthology *Fairytales for Feisty Girls* by Susannah McFarlane and illustrating Emma Allen's *The Night of the Hiding Moon*.

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