



The Clay Marble

by Minfong Ho

Teacher's Guide

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Synopsis

Chapter 1

For the past nine days, 12-year-old Dara and the remaining members of her family have been trekking to Nong Chan, a refugee camp located on the Thai-Cambodia border. The family consists of Dara, her 18-year-old brother Sarun, her mother, and her grandfather. Their village, Siem Reap, has been burned out by the Khmer Rouge soldiers to prevent the invading Vietnamese from getting the rice and other provisions. As she walks, Dara thinks back to the previous three years, when waves of armies fought in their country, Cambodia. Her father has been killed by the Khmer Rouge. Shortly after she turned twelve, Vietnamese soldiers liberated her village from Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge army. Sarun was able to escape from a work crew and return to the family. Now that the Khmer Rouge are in retreat and the new Vietnamese-controlled regime has yet to establish power, the family is trying to rebuild their lives.

The family is elated to find a man driving an ox cart packed with provisions. The man verifies that the refugee camp does exist and has plenty of provisions for everyone.

Chapter 2

Dara and her family arrive at Nong Chan, which is packed with thousands of refugees peacefully going about the business of daily life. They set up camp near another family. Eighteen-year-old Nea introduces her family—her grandfather and her cousins Jantu and Jantu's baby brother—and shares their ample food. Nea takes Dara for a lovely cool bath and the girls are soon fast friends. Dara is happy to fill her starving belly with rice.

Chapter 3

The next morning, Dara meets Jantu and her baby brother. The girls trade jibes and become friends. Jantu takes Dara to the lunch truck. Hundreds of children line up for a delicious meal. Jantu treats her brother tenderly, feeding him the choicest pieces of stew.

Chapter 4

Dara learns that every week or two, a convoy of trucks delivers basic supplies such as rice, cooking oil, and salted fish. Dara's family joins Nea's team to receive supplies. Even though at least 40,000 refugees line up for supplies, distribution is fast and smooth. Sarun and Nea fall in love and he courts her, praising his village and asking that she marry him and return there to live. For the first time in years, Dara feels hope for the future.

Chapter 5

Thanks to her friendship with Jantu, days in camp pass quickly for Dara. Jantu shares folktales and makes clever toys. Chnay, a bully, breaks an especially clever toy, a model of two women thrashing rice. To make Dara feel better at the loss of

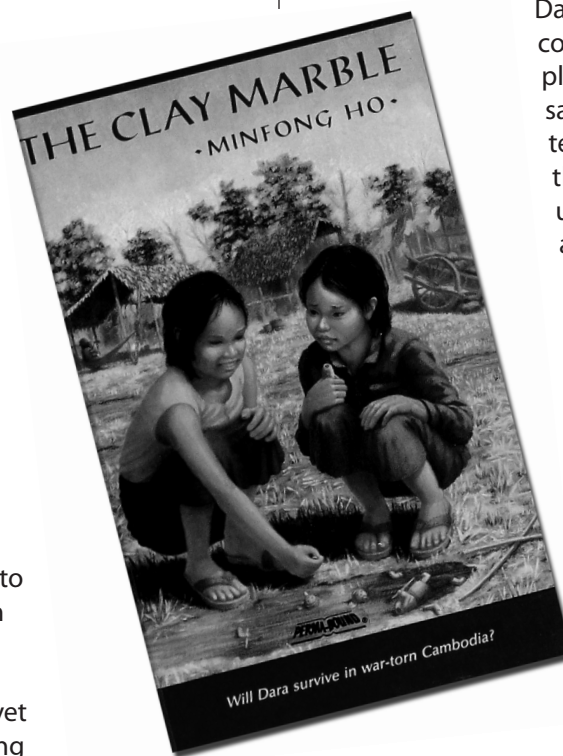
the toy, Jantu makes her a marble and blows on it to make it "magic." Dara feels better holding the marble.

Chapter 6

As they play with a clay village that Jantu has made, Dara explains how sad she feels because nothing in her life ever lasts. Her family has crumbled, and now she has only bits and pieces of them remaining. Playing with the clay village helps Dara re-create her family and dream of future happiness.

Chapter 7

Sarun refuses to join the army, preferring to return to his village to plant his fields and tend his family. Grandpa Kem realizes that the Border is being bombed, so the refugees move toward Thailand. Along the way, they see



many lost children who will likely be picked up by soldiers and locked into an orphanage, where they will be forced to become slaves. When she spots the lunch wagon, Dara convinces Jantu to come with her to get a meal. They break away from the others and run to the lunch wagon, but it is empty. Suddenly, a bomb explodes, killing and injuring many. Baby's foot is badly hurt and Dara runs off to get help.

Chapter 8

A rescue worker sends Jantu and Baby to the hospital, so Dara sets off to find her family. Dara is frightened, but Jantu makes her another magic marble to make her strong, brave, and patient.

Chapter 9

Dara returns to the refugee camp, but it is completely deserted and destroyed. A kindly old man gives her a small handful of cold rice, all that she has had to eat in two days.

Chapter 10

Dara meets Chnay, the bully, who suspects that Dara's family has joined General Kung Silor's Khmer Serei military camp east of Nong Chan. Chnay somehow secures some rice for Dara, and she realizes that she would be best off teaming up with him.

Chapter 11

They arrive at the Khmer Serei camp, and once again Chnay procures food. Dara soon learns to scrounge for food as she searches fruitlessly for her family. Desperate, she enters the General's kitchen to steal some chicken. When the General catches her, Dara stands up to him and gets a job working in the kitchen because he admires her bravery and spirit. Dara is convinced that her spunk comes from Jantu's magic marble, secure in her pocket.

Chapter 12

Chnay agrees to keep looking for Dara's family in exchange for food. Dara is sent to winnow rice and realizes that the soldiers and refugees are eating the precious seed rice, destroying their future. She suddenly spots Sarun, who has become a guard. She then finds her mother and the rest of her family.

Chapter 13

Reunited with her family, Dara learns that Sarun and Nea are engaged, even though Sarun has become militaristic, selfish, and self-centered. But Dara has also changed, becoming self-assured and assertive. Dara

decides to take control and return her family to their village, even if Sarun refuses to leave. With Nea's reluctant help, they clean the oxcart and load the bags of supplies.

Chapter 14

After much begging, Dara convinces Sarun to get her the special pass necessary to visit Jantu and Baby in the hospital. Clutching the magic marble for strength, Dara takes Nea to the refugee hospital. They ride in a jeep (Dara's first automobile ride) to the wards and finally locate their friends. Nearly all the children are dying of dysentery, malaria, and severe malnutrition, as well as their wounds. Jantu is delighted to see them and is ready to leave because her brother is almost healed. Duoic, a boy who has lost both legs in a land mine accident, has nearly given up hope because of the severity of his injury and his lack of family.

Chapter 15

On the way back to camp, Dara, Jantu, Baby, and Nea lose their way. Sarun's soldiers accidentally shoot Jantu, injuring her severely. They refuse to take her to the hospital, however, because they do not want to miss a major military flag raising in the morning.

Chapter 16

Dara begs her magic marble to help Jantu live, but Jantu dies. As she is dying, Jantu tries to convince Dara to believe in herself rather than in magic charms.

Chapter 17

Sarun returns from the military exercise to announce that he has decided to enlist in the army. By explaining the futility of war and the importance of family, Dara convinces Sarun to change his mind and return to their village. Dara makes her own magic marble.

Chapter 18

Chnay gives Dara a farewell present, a cowbell that he has made, but refuses her offer to join her family. He apologizes for smashing things in the past. On the way home, Dara loses Jantu's magic marble, but Nea reassures her that the magic is now all in Dara herself. Realizing that Nea is correct, Dara throws away the marble she had made. She now understands that the magic really is inside her.

Afterward

The story flashes forward ten years. Dara is happily married and the mother of a young daughter. The country is still at war, but Dara and her husband; Sarun, Nea, and

their three children; and Dara’s mother have made a new life. Dara wants to teach her own child to make a magic marble, to believe in herself and her power to forge her own life.

Timeline

- ca. 800** Khmer empire is established.
- 1130** First temple at Angor Wat is built
- 1431** Phnomh Penh becomes capital of Cambodia.
- 1862** French gain control of Cambodia.
- 1941** Prince Sihanouk becomes king.
- 1954** French colonial rule in Indochina ends; Cambodia becomes independent.
- 1955** Sihanouk becomes prime minister.
- 1957** North Vietnam begins supporting South Vietnamese rebels.
- ca. 1960** Khmer Rouge begins actively opposing Cambodian government.
- 1965** United States sends ground troops to South Vietnam.
Cambodia breaks diplomatic ties with the United States; U.S. ends foreign aid.
- 1969** Sihanouk allows North Vietnamese troops to enter Cambodia.
- 1970** Pro-U.S. dissidents overthrow Sihanouk’s regime. U.S. and South Vietnamese troops attack North Vietnamese forces in Cambodia.
- 1971** U.S. troops begin leaving Vietnam.
- 1973** Ceasefire declared in Vietnam.
Last U.S. troops leave Vietnam.
- 1975** January: Khmer Rouge besiege Phnomh Penh.
April 17: The Khmer Rouge capture Phnomh Penh. Thousands flee.
- 1976** Khmer Rouge begins forcing people to leave cities. Millions people die.
- 1979** Jan. 7: Vietnamese forces oust Khmer Rouge and install puppet government in Phnomh Penh. Chinese invade Vietnam in support of Khmer Rouge.
- 1989** Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia.
- 1990** United Nations sponsors cease-fire in Cambodia.
- 1993** May: Coalition led by Sihanouk wins U.N.-sponsored elections.
September: Sihanouk becomes king.
- 1996** Khmer Rouge rebels begin to disarm.

Author Sketch

Minfong Ho was born in 1951 in Rangoon, Burma, the daughter of an economist and a chemist. Raised in Singapore and Thailand, she is fluent in Chinese, Thai, and English. Although she writes in English, Ho feels that she has never been able to bridge the languages of her life. Having lived in America for 20 years, she notes that “even now, when I cry, I cry in Chinese.”



At Cornell University, Ho began a short story that later became her first novel, *Sing to the Dawn*. “When I wrote *Sing to the Dawn*, it was in moments of homesickness during the thick of winter in upstate New York, when Thailand seemed incredibly far away,” Ho said in an interview in *Contemporary Authors*. The original story describes how Dawan, a schoolgirl from a rural Thai village, encounters resistance from her father and brother when she wins a scholarship to the city high school. Ho submitted the work for the Council for Interracial Books for Children’s annual short story contest and won the award for the Asian American Division of unpublished Third World Authors; she was then encouraged to enlarge the story into a novel. “The manuscript was later published (through no effort of mine),” Ho recalled for CA.



"Suddenly a whole new dimension of writing opened to me: it became a communicative rather than a cathartic activity. I had always written, but now I would have readers!"

Ho attended Tunghai University, Taichung, Taiwan, 1968-69, and then earned a BA in history and economics from Cornell University in 1973 and an M.F.A. in creative writing seven years later. That same year, Ho was so moved by the plight of the Cambodian refugees that she joined Catholic Relief Services to work with refugees on the Thai-Cambodian border.

After marrying and starting her family, Ho published *Rice without Rain*, which retells the experiences of another village girl in Thailand. In *The Clay Marble*, Ho again presents a strong female protagonist and employs the theme of family unity in the face of adversity. Ho has published several other children's books, a number of translations, and is working on several similar projects. In addition to writing, Ho has given writing workshops to middle school and high school students in Switzerland, Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia, as well as Ithaca, where she makes her home.

Critic's Corner

Though some reviewers felt that Ho's characters lacked depth and that her language was at times too sophisticated for a twelve-year-old protagonist, many critics found much to admire in *The Clay Marble*. For example, *Horn Book* reviewer Maeve Visser Knoth wrote: "Details of life in Cambodia are described carefully and thoroughly but never overwhelm this moving story." She noted that the book depicted a "people who have rarely had a voice in children's literature." In the October 1, 1991, issue of *Kirkus Reviews*, the critic commented that Ho "shapes her story to dramatize political and humanitarian issues. The easily swayed Sarun lacks dimension, but the girls are more subtly drawn—Dara's growing courage and assertiveness are especially convincing and admirable. The reviewer concluded that the book was "touching, authentic, and carefully wrought."

An adult reader also praised the novel: "I actually read this before I realized it was labeled a 'children's book' and found it an easy and delightful read. Ho Minfong has a very light touch and manages to capture the period with a child's eye brilliantly. All too often we read similar works relating to this time and place and they are written from the point of view of what the author

thinks the readers (or more particularly the publishers or their well meaning sponsors) expect them to say - with a lot of righteous indignation and hindsight. This book, in contrast, has the touch of honesty through which the horrors of the environment shine through. This is the mark of a master storyteller. Having used the book also as a text to teach children English at the same time as giving them an insight into the period, I have found it most useful - it holds attention to the story line, is simply written in excellent English. I would commend it to anybody, adult or child, as a piece of literature."

Other Books by Minfong Ho

Brother Rabbit: A Cambodian Tale (1997) (With Saphan Ros)
The Clay Marble (1991)
Hush!: A Thai Lullaby (1996)
Maples in the Mist: Children's Poems from the Tang Dynasty (1996)
(Translator and compiler)
Peek!: A Thai Hide-And-Seek (2004)
Rice Without Rain (1990)
Sing to the Dawn (1975)
Stone Goddess (2003)
Tanjong Rhu and Other Stories (1986)
The Two Brothers (1995) (With Saphan Ros)

Bibliography

Books

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Twentieth-Century Young Adult Writers, St. James Press, 1994, pp. 292-93.

Periodicals

Booklist, July 1990, p. 2083; March 1, 1995, p. 1244.
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, November 1975, p. 46; June 1990, p. 241; December 1991, p. 92; April 1996, p. 266; May 1997, p. 324.
Five Owls, January-February, 1997, p. 57.
Horn Book, November 1990, p. 749; January-February 1992, p. 71; July 1995 p. 471; May-June 1997, pp. 333-34.
Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, Vol. 8, No. 7, 1977, pp. 5, 21.
Kirkus Reviews, June 1, 1975, p. 604; May 1, 1991, p. 649; Oct. 1, 1991, p. 1287; Feb. 1, 1996, p. 227.
New York Times Book Review, Oct. 7, 1990, p. 30; April 26, 1992, p. 25; Aug. 13, 1995, p. 23.

Publishers Weekly, March 25, 1996, p. 82; April 14, 1997, p. 75.
School Library Journal, March 1976, p. 104; September 1990,
 p. 250; June 1995, p. 102; March 1996, p. 175;
 September 1996.
Times Educational Supplement, Feb. 13, 1987, p. 44; Sept. 22,
 1989, p. 30.
Voice of Youth Advocates, December 1995, p. 302.

General Objectives

1. To analyze war
2. To evaluate how people bond during times of extreme stress
3. To recognize the themes of loyalty and acceptance
4. To understand the importance of family
5. To understand the novel's title
6. To explore the ways that people become empowered
7. To find examples of families torn from their homes
8. To understand how people can be bound by love and determination
9. To describe the novel's mood or atmosphere
10. To predict what the future holds for Cambodia

Specific Objectives

1. To explore why Cambodia was at war
2. To analyze Sarun's desire to join the army
3. To probe the relationship between Sarun and Nea
4. To understand the destruction caused by Pol Pot's reign
5. To see how political issues affect the lives of everyday people
6. To trace Dara's growing courage and assertiveness
7. To understand the story's pathos and pain
8. To compare and contrast Nea and Dara
9. To learn more about southeast Asia
10. To identify the novel's structure, especially its climax

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Minfong Ho's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

foreshadowing: clues that hint at what will happen later on in the story. Writers use foreshadowing to create suspense and link related details. For example, in *The Clay Marble*, Minfong Ho uses foreshadowing early on when Dara realizes that nothing in her life is stable. This

foreshadows the family's next move closer to the Thai border.

figures of speech: (or figurative language) words and expressions not meant to be taken literally. Figurative language uses words in fresh, new ways to appeal to the imagination. Figures of speech include similes, metaphors, extended metaphors, hyperbole, and personification. For example, Ho uses the following simile to describe the airplanes: "Tiny silver airplanes, like fishes in the sky, would fly over us before disappearing into the horizon."

point of view: the position from which a story is told. In *The Clay Marble*, Ho uses the first-person point of view. The narrator is one of the characters in the story and explains the events through his or her own eyes, using the pronouns I and me. This first-person narrator, Dara, gives the story a freshness and immediacy. Readers experience events through Dara's eyes, which makes the story more dramatic.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about *The Clay Marble* and the situation in Cambodia, consult the following sources.

Fiction

Jewell Reinhart Coburn, Angkat, *The Cambodian Cinderella*
 Borton De Trevino, *Juan De Pareja*
 Joyce Hansen, *The Gift-Giver*
 Wei Jiang, *Legend of Mu Lan*
 Elizabeth Laird, *Kiss the Dust*
 Margaret Read MacDonald, *The Girl Who Wore Too Much*
 Cathy Spagnoli, *Judge Rabbit and the Tree Spirit: A Folktale from Cambodia* (Bilingual in English and Khmer)
 Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*

Nonfiction

Cathryn Alpert, *Rocket City*
 Elizabeth Becker, *When the War Was Over: Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge Revolution*
 David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*
 Joshua Eliot, et al, *Footprint Cambodia Handbook*
 Claude Jacques, Michael Freeman, *Ancient Angkor*
 Henry Kamm, *Cambodia*
 Henry Kamm, *Cambodia: Report from a Stricken Land*
 Robert Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia, a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*
 Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia Under the Khmer Rouge, 1975-79*

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Stephen J. Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia: Political Culture; the Causes of War*

Dith Pran, *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields: Memoirs by Survivors*

Nick Ray, *Lonely Planet Cambodia*

Philip S. Rawson, *The Art of Southeast Asia*

Anita Sach, *Cambodia: Bradt Travel Guide*

Loung Ung, *First They Killed My Father*

Videos

Sacred Waters of Cambodia

Raising the Bamboo Curtain—Emerging Burma and Cambodia

Lost Spirits of Cambodia

In the Shadow of Angkor Wat

The Living Edens: Thailand: Jewel of the Orient

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Minfong Ho's *The Clay Marble* should include these aspects:

Themes

- war
- family love
- starvation
- friendship
- grief
- loss
- loyalty
- dislocation
- rebuilding your life
- self-esteem
- self-reliance

Motifs

- coping with battlefield violence, horror, and chaos
- dealing with shifting alliances
- building new families by bonding with other people
- the powerful effect of strong, loving families
- learning to defy cultural values
- gravitating toward powerful leaders
- overcoming fear
- surviving against seemingly insurmountable odds
- being torn from your home
- determination that even war cannot destroy

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. But that had left us with nothing to eat, no rice seed with which to plant our next crop of rice, not even a house to live in. (Chap. 1, p. 5)
(The Khmer Rouge soldiers had set fire to everything in the village, even the houses and rice barns, so that the invading Vietnamese soldiers wouldn't be able to claim them. However, this "scorched earth" policy has left Dara and her family, along with all the other villagers, with nothing. As a result, they are forced to leave their village if they are to have any hope of survival.)
2. If I were a tadpole weaving my way through a big, flooded seedbed, and each rice seedling were a refugee family, that might be how big this camp is! (Chap. 4, p. 32)
(There are more than 40,000 refugees in the Nong Chan refugee camp alone, which shows the extent of the cultural dislocation in Cambodia as a result of the continuing wars. This tremendous social upheaval continues to this day.)
3. "You see?" Jantu continued with a shrug. "The leaders of Cambodia are just like those four deaf brothers, fighting among themselves because they cannot hear one another." (Chap. 5, p. 39)
(Jantu has told Dara a traditional Cambodian fable about four deaf brothers. The brothers were living together peacefully until a crocodile wandered into their house. The oldest brother shouted out a warning, which the second deaf brother misunderstood as an attack and so he armed himself with a stick. Seeing the stick, the third deaf brother decided the first two were planning to kill him, so he grabbed a knife. The last deaf brother threw a rock at the crocodile, which bounced off its hide and killed one of the brothers. Instantly, the brothers set upon one another as the crocodile escaped. The story illustrates the need for communication, missing among the Cambodian leaders.)
4. Maybe, I thought, she did put some magic in the marble. After all, why else would I feel better, just holding it. (Chap. 5, p. 43)
(To soothe her after Chnay the bully destroys a toy, Jantu makes Dara a marble from clay. Initially, Dara is unimpressed by the plain marble, especially when compared to the clever toy Chnay had smashed. To make the marble more special, Jantu blows on it and says "There! Now it is a magic marble." Since she is so fond of Jantu and believes in her power to create magic, Dara is greatly soothed by the "magic" marble.)
5. "No, I meant...I just meant that nothing nice ever lasts." (Chap. 6, p. 45)
(Since everything she has ever loved has been snatched away—her father, her home, her friends, even her food—Dara believes that life is fragile and unpredictable. Jantu explains that

everything does crumble, so they have to create new families from the bits and pieces remaining. Dara's family and Jantu's family have done just that by bonding together. Later, the process will be formalized when Dara's brother Sarun and Jantu's cousin Nea marry.)

6. Jantu shook her head. "Things that can break," she said slowly, "are not worth taking." (Chap. 7, p. 57) *(When the shelling resumes, the families must leave the refugee camp and move on. Dara is very upset because she has started to rebuild her life. She wants to take the cunning little clay toys that Jantu has made. The girls use these toys to recreate their village and their life before the war. Jantu explains to Dara that we can only take with us that which we hold in our hearts. People must store up memories of beloved people and special good times to use when they are bereft. Later, Dara will do just this when Jantu is killed by stray sniper fire.)*
7. "Is it really a magic marble?" (Chap. 8, p. 70) *(After Dara has been separated from her mother, Jantu makes Dara another marble, even more magic than the first one. Jantu reassures Dara that this marble will make her strong, brave, and patient, qualities that Dara will need as she goes off to find her mother. Jantu explains that if Dara believes in the marble, then it will help you. The marble functions as a talisman to enable Dara to go off on her own.)*
8. "Stealing food? How dare they steal from Kung Silor?" (Chap. 11, p. 91) *(Driven by hunger and desperation, Dara has broken into the leader's kitchen and tried to steal a chicken. While Dara believes that she has been empowered by the magic marble, it is really her own courage developing through adversity. Dara defies the leader, Kung Silor. He admires her bravery and gives her the food she wants, as well as a job in the kitchen so she can continue to eat.)*
9. Just then a shot rang out, ripping apart the shroud of silence around us. (Chap. 15, p. 133) *(When they get lost on the path, Dara, Nea, Jantu and Baby accidentally run into guards, headed by Dara's brother Sarun. Hearing a noise, the guards fire into the group, mortally wounding Jantu. Although Dara has been becoming more and more courageous through Jantu's example as well as necessity, Jantu's death propels her into full maturity. This tragedy gives her the impetus to stand up to her brother and succeed in preventing him from joining the army. Instead of fighting, he helps the family return to their village and rebuild their life.)*
10. I held my marble a moment longer. Then I stood up in the oxcart and, taking a deep breath, flung the marble away. (Chap. 19, p. 160)

(Dara now realizes what Jantu had been trying to teach her all along: true magic lies within ourselves. We all have the power to shape our fate and do not have to rely on outside amulets or people. The magic is not in the marble: it is within ourselves.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where does the story take place? *(The story takes place in Cambodia in the early 1980s. It begins in a refugee camp called Nong Chan, where 40,000 Cambodians have sought shelter after their villages had been destroyed by Pol Pot's soldiers. The action then moves closer to the Thai border, as the family is once again displaced. Finally, the action shifts forward ten years, as the family has successfully resettled in their home village, Siem Reap, and rebuilt their lives.)*
2. Why are Dara, her family, and so many other Cambodians in refugee camps? *(In 1975, the Communist Khmer Rouge declared victory in Cambodia. The country was closed off from the rest of the world and more than a million Cambodians were killed. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia, the rest of the world realized how people had been running for their lives from invading soldiers.)*
3. Why does Jantu make magic marbles for Dara? *(Jantu makes the marbles to help Dara get through difficult times. The first marble helps soothe Dara after the destruction of their toy, the second marble helps Dara believe that she has the strength to find her mother alone, and the third marble enables Dara to return her family to their village.)*
4. How does Dara get separated and reunited with her family? *(After the shelling resumes, Dara and her family flee to safety near the Thai border. On their trek, Dara spots a lunch truck and convinces Jantu (and Baby) to stop with her to get some food. When they reach the truck, a bomb explodes. People are killed, injured, and displaced in the resulting melee.)*
5. How does Jantu die? *(On the way back to camp after leaving the hospital, Jantu, Dara, and Nea take a wrong turn in the dark jungle. They are mistakenly attacked by Sarun's guards and Jantu is shot in the chest. She is killed by her own people, in what has come to be called "friendly fire.")*

Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)

6. Why won't Chnay come with Dara to rebuild his life?
(Chnay does not feel that he belongs with Dara and her family because he does not have any family of his own. He knows that he will feel out of place and even more isolated and lonely. In the refugee camp, Chnay can be with many other orphaned boys who have learned to live by their wits alone.)
7. Why is Dara so upset when the soldiers eat the rice seed?
(The rice represents their future. Without rice seed, the refugees have no chance at all of rebuilding their former lives because they do not have a way to feed themselves. When the seed is gone, so is her hope for the future.)
8. How does Dara change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
(At the beginning of the novel, Dara is shy, quiet, and unassertive. For example, Dara is so modest that she is initially reluctant to wash in the open. She only agrees to a bath when Nea shows her that there is nothing to fear. In the same way, Dara would not dream of defying her elders — especially her brother, the head of the family. By the end of the novel, however, Dara has become brave and assertive. She not only steals chicken from Kung Silor's personal kitchen, but also wrangles a job from him to ensure that she will eat regularly. Even more important, Dara resolves to defy her brother and return her family to their village. Without his knowledge, Dara packs the ox cart with provisions and tools and convinces the rest of her family to accompany her home. She talks Sarun out of enlisting and into coming home with them.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

9. What effect does the writer create by using Dara as a first-person narrator? How would the novel have changed with a different point of view?
(The first-person narrator gives the book a power and immediacy. Since all events are filtered through Dara's eyes, readers get a first-hand view into the horrors of the Cambodian war. This makes the story much more powerful.)
10. What does the marble symbolize in the novel?
(The marble symbolizes a belief in yourself. Jantu makes the "magic" marble to comfort Dara after the loss of the rice-thrashing toy. Dara clutches the marble as a talisman, which she believes has the magical power to give her strength. As the novel progresses, Dara slowly comes to realize that she does not need a marble—or anything of the sort—since she has within herself the power to chart her fate.)

Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)

11. Working with a small group of classmates, discuss some ways that you might have coped with Dara's situation had you been in her place.
12. Argue that the marble was or was not magic.

Across the Curriculum

Art

1. Design a poster for a movie version of *The Clay Marble*.
2. Make some clay marbles as Jantu did. On an index card, explain the magical powers that each of your marbles possesses.
3. Construct a clay model of the village of Siem Reap and invite classmates to play with it as Jantu and Dara did.
4. Make a clever toy to amuse a terrified teenager, as Jantu did for Dara. If you wish, take your toys (as well as those made by your classmates) to a children's hospital.
5. Make a recruiting poster for Kung Silor's army.

Drama

1. Working with a group of classmates, teach the class about contemporary Cambodian culture and history.
2. Role-play the first meeting between Dara and Jantu. Try to capture each girl's personality with your body language and gestures as well as words.
3. Working with a group of classmates, dramatize the wedding between Nea and Sarun. You may wish to play a recording of a traditional Cambodian song as background music.
4. Imagine you were a relief worker in a Cambodian refugee camp. Working with two classmates, soothe Jantu and Baby after Baby is injured in the bomb attack.
5. Retell the story of the four deaf brothers that Jantu tells in Chapter 5. In your retelling, make the story highly dramatic by varying your volume, pitch, and intonation.

History and Geography

1. Find out more about the famous Buddhist temple at Angkor Watt. Construct a scale model and explain why the temple is so important.
2. Learn about the Khmer Rouge. Share your findings in the form of a news report or a panel discussion.
3. Who was Pol Pot? Find out and share your discoveries with the class as a news conference.
4. Make a map showing the route that Dara and her family took from their village to the first refugee camp, the second refugee camp, and back to their village again.

Language Arts

1. Imagine that like Dara, you were forced to suddenly leave your home and could only carry a few small objects with you. List the three objects you would bring along. In an essay, explain why you chose these objects. Was it their usefulness, sentimental value, economic value, or for some other reason?
2. Write a eulogy that Dara might have delivered at Jantu's funeral.
3. Jantu tells Dara many traditional Cambodian folktales. Using one of Minfong Ho's books of Cambodian folktales, create a picture book version of the folktale. Or, you can use a folktale from your own heritage as the basis of the picture book. Read your book to a group of kindergarten children or first graders.
4. Dara believes that "nothing nice ever lasts." Agree or disagree with this statement in a four paragraph persuasive essay. Be sure to cite specific details from the novel and your own experience to support your opinion.
5. Kung Silor says that he likes Dara because she has "spirit." Explain how Dara does indeed have "spirit." In a comparison-contrast essay, show how you and Dara are the same and different.
6. Draw each family's tree to show how Dara's family and Nea's family are related.

7. The book ends with an Afterword, in which Dara explains what happens to the family ten years in the future. Write a Prequel in which you describe what life was like for Dara's family ten years before the novel begins.
8. Create a new title for the novel. Explain how it fits the story's plot, mood, and theme.

Music

1. In Chapter 6, Jantu sings a traditional lullaby to Dara. Later, when Jantu dies, Dara sings the lullaby to her. Sing a lullaby to soothe a small child.
2. Select an especially dramatic scene from the novel, such as the scene when Sarun's soldiers shoot Jantu. Then select some background music that captures the scene's mood. Read the scene to the class, playing the music in the background. After your reading, poll the class to determine how the music changed the scene's impact.

Science and Health

1. Rice is a staple of life in many other countries, especially Japan, China, Cambodia, and Thailand. Explain why rice is nutritious by describing the vitamins and minerals it contains.
2. Many unfamiliar plants and trees are mentioned in this novel. Find out what trees and plants are native to Cambodia. Select any four varieties, draw them on poster board, and label each part with a description of its use.
3. The cook has a monkey on a leash. Do monkeys make good pets? Research this issue and share your results in a web page, poster, or report.
4. Find out how to plant, grow, and harvest rice. If possible, plant a small crop in a container and bring it to the classroom to grow.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Role-play the scene in which Dara confronts King Silor.
2. Write the newspaper article about the Khmer Rouge takeover of Cambodia.

3. Create a three-dimensional model of Dara's village. Label each part with appropriate quotations from the novel.
4. Using key scenes from the novel, create a mural that shows its main themes.
5. Compose an alternate ending in which Sarun does enlist in the army. Does Dara still return home? What happens to Nea? Tie up all the loose ends in your alternate ending.
6. Read another book by Minfong Ho. Compare and contrast it to *The Clay Marble*.

Alternate Assessment

1. Explain how parents can help their teenagers cope with vast cultural dislocations, such as the one that Dara experienced.
2. Retell the events in this novel from Jantu's point of view.
3. Compose an extended character sketch of Sarun and Nea in which you compare and contrast their personalities, goals, and achievements.
4. Write a critical review of the novel for publication in the school newspaper.

Teacher's Notes

Vocabulary

Complete the following chart by writing a synonym and an antonym for each of these vocabulary words from *The Clay Marble*. After you have completed the chart, see how many more synonyms and antonyms you can find. Add them to the chart as well.

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. grim	_____	_____
2. curt	_____	_____
3. stagnant	_____	_____
4. fervor	_____	_____
5. insolent	_____	_____
6. clan	_____	_____
7. monsoon	_____	_____
8. forlorn	_____	_____
9. unscathed	_____	_____
10. radiance	_____	_____
11. belligerent	_____	_____
12. emigrate	_____	_____
13. flux	_____	_____
14. frail	_____	_____
15. flimsy	_____	_____
16. gaunt	_____	_____
17. desolate	_____	_____
18. elusive	_____	_____
19. defiant	_____	_____
20. timid	_____	_____

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blanks provided.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| ___ 1. Jantu's grandfather | A. Siem Reap |
| ___ 2. Jantu's baby brother, badly injured in a bomb attack | B. King Silor |
| ___ 3. The bully who makes Dara a cowbell | C. Dara |
| ___ 4. The fierce army leader who admires Dara's spirit | D. Sarun |
| ___ 5. Sarun's fiancée | E. Nong Chan |
| ___ 6. The narrator, a twelve-year-old girl | F. Nea |
| ___ 7. The creative teenager who makes Dara the magic marbles | G. Bou Kem |
| ___ 8. The first refugee camp | H. Jantu |
| ___ 9. Dara's older brother | I. Nebut |
| ___ 10. Dara's home village | J. Chnay |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- ___ 1. Dara's father was killed by the Khmer Rouge.
- ___ 2. There are very few people in the refugee camp and they do not get along well with each other because provisions are in short supply.
- ___ 3. Sarun and Jantu fall in love and he courts her, praising his village and asking that she marry him and return there to live.
- ___ 4. A bomb explodes by the empty lunch wagon, killing and injuring many people.
- ___ 5. A rescue worker sends Dara and Nea to the hospital, so Dara sets off to find her family.
- ___ 6. Dara enters the General's kitchen to steal some chicken but when the General catches her, Dara stands up to him and gets a job working in the kitchen.
- ___ 7. Dara never finds her family in the second refugee camp.
- ___ 8. Sarun becomes militaristic, selfish, and self-centered.
- ___ 9. As she is dying, Jantu tries to convince Dara to believe in herself rather than in magic charms.
- ___ 10. At the end of the book, Dara realizes that the magic is inside herself and she does not need a magic marble.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Motivation (30 points)

Complete each line below with a reason or explanation.

1. When the novel opens, Dara and the remaining members of her family have been trekking to a refugee camp located on the Thai-Cambodia border because _____
2. As they walk, the family is elated to find a man driving an ox cart packed with provisions because _____

3. Days in camp pass quickly for Dara because _____
4. As they play with a clay village that Jantu has made, Dara explains how sad she feels because _____

5. The refugees must move on because _____
6. Chnay and Dara team up because _____
7. Duoic has nearly given up hope because _____
8. The soldiers refuse to take Jantu to the hospital because _____
9. Sarun does not enlist in the army because _____
10. Dara throws away the marble she had made because _____

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Dara's life in the refugee camp to her former life in her village.
2. Explain how Sarun changes from the beginning of the novel to the end.
3. Describe the scene Dara and Nea encounter in the hospital.
4. Why are the clay marbles so important to Dara?

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Underline a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements.

1. Nong Chan is a (**refugee camp, Cambodian leader**).
2. Jantu's father was killed by (**a land mine, the Khmer Rouge**).
3. There are about (**4,000; 40,000**) people in the first refugee camp.
4. Jantu makes (**toys, clothing**) for Dara.
5. Lost children will likely end up being (**reunited with their parents, forced into slavery**).
6. Jantu's baby brother is injured by a (**bomb, bullet**).
7. Dara gets a job in the (**kitchen, hospital**).
8. The soldiers refuse to take Jantu to the (**military flag raising, hospital**) until the next day.
9. As she is dying, Jantu tries to convince Dara to believe in (**herself, magic charms**).
10. Chnay gives Dara a farewell present, a (**clay marble, cowbell**) that he has made.

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| ___ 1. Dara's grandfather | A. Siem Reap |
| ___ 2. The bully who teams up with Dara in the second refuge camp | B. King Silor |
| ___ 3. The brutal leader of the Khmer Rouge | C. Dara |
| ___ 4. The fierce army leader who admires Dara's spirit | D. Sarun |
| ___ 5. Sarun's fiancée | E. Duoic |
| ___ 6. The narrator, a twelve-year-old girl | F. Nea |
| ___ 7. The creative teenager who makes Dara the magic marbles | G. Bou Kem |
| ___ 8. A young boy whose legs are destroyed by a land mine | H. Jantu |
| ___ 9. Dara's older brother, in love with Nea | I. Chnay |
| ___ 10. Dara's home village | J. Pol Pot |

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Identification (20 points)

Explain why each is important in the story.

1. Jantu's marbles
2. rice
3. the cowbell
4. the oxcart
5. the lunch cart

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Who is the novel's main character? Why?
2. Trace the novel's plot. Include the rising action, climax, and denouement
3. Is Jantu a good friend to Dara? Why or why not?
4. Compare Dara at the beginning and end of the novel.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

Vocabulary Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. grim	sad	happy
2. curt	brief	expansive
3. stagnant	not moving	flowing
4. fervor	ardor	indifference
5. insolent	rude	friendly
6. clan	family group	isolated
7. monsoon	heavy rain	drought
8. forlorn	lonely	gregarious
9. unscathed	unharmed	harmed
10. radiance	brilliance	colorless
11. belligerent	fierce	placid
12. emigrate	move	stay put
13. flux	change	stasis
14. frail	weak	strong
15. flimsy	easily broken	strong
16. gaunt	very thin	heavy, robust
17. desolate	lonely	cheerful
18. elusive	cannot be caught	obvious
19. defiant	obstinate	pliant
20. timid	shy	outgoing

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. C |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. J | 8. E |
| 4. B | 9. D |
| 5. F | 10. A |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Motivation (30 points)

1. their village has been burned to the ground by the Khmer Rouge to prevent the invading Vietnamese from getting the rice and other provisions
2. the man verifies that the refugee camp exists and has plenty of provisions for everyone
3. of her friendship with Jantu
4. nothing in her life ever lasts.
5. the Border is being bombed

6. they can help each other survive
7. of the severity of his injury and his lack of family
8. they do not want to miss a major military flag raising in the morning.
9. Dara convinces Sarun to change his mind and return to their village by explaining the futility of war and the importance of family
10. she now understands that the magic really is inside her

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------|
| 1. refugee camp | 6. bomb |
| 2. the Khmer Rouge | 7. kitchen |
| 3. 40,000 | 8. hospital |
| 4. toys | 9. herself |
| 5. forced into slavery | 10. cowbell |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. C |
| 2. I | 7. H |
| 3. J | 8. E |
| 4. B | 9. D |
| 5. F | 10. A |

Part III: Identification (20 points)

1. Jantu's marbles help Dara gain the confidence she needs to survive.
2. Rice is the staple of life. With rice, the people can survive; without it, they are doomed.
3. The cowbell is the gift that Chnay the bully makes as a farewell present for Dara. It shows that he is growing and maturing. Now he regrets how he destroyed the toys that Jantu made.
4. The oxcart is the family's vehicle, also necessary for their survival.
5. At first, the lunch cart is a positive symbol because it brings the family food. By the middle of the novel, however, it becomes a negative symbol because it is the site of major bombing attack.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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