

Yeh Shen

A Chinese Cinderella Story

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Characters

Circle the character you will play.

*Ancestors 1, 2, 3

*Stepmother

*Jin-Li, Yeh Shen's
stepsister

*Yeh Shen
Fish

Guests 1, 2, 3

Noblemen 1, 2

Prince Renshu
Guard

* indicates large speaking role



Theme The story of Cinderella has been told in different ways around the world. It has a big idea about fairness that people everywhere seem to love. As you read this version from China, look for this idea.

LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 8 WORDS IN BOLD



Scene 1 A Courtyard

Ancestor 1: A thousand greetings from the spirit world.
Ancestor 2: Today is Yu Lan, which means Ghost Day.
Ancestor 3: It is the day we Ancestors return to Earth . . .
Ancestor 1: and bring luck to those we deem worthy.
Ancestor 2: Here is the story of one such girl,
Ancestor 3: whose father passed away . . .
Ancestor 1: leaving her in the care of a cruel stepmother . . .
Ancestor 2: and a jealous stepsister, Jin-Li.
Ancestor 3: They dress her in rags and order her about.
Stepmother: Sweep the courtyard, lazy girl!
Jin-Li: And get rid of that hornet's nest.
Stepmother: Chop some firewood.
Jin-Li: Enough for a year!
Ancestor 1: Oh, we what know you're thinking:
Ancestor 2: that the young girl's name is Cinderella.
Ancestor 3: Well, not exactly.

Cinderella Around the World

Versions of "Cinderella" have been told around the globe for centuries. They almost always include a magical helper. Here are some examples.

Ancestor 1: Our Cinderella lives in China.
Ancestor 2: And her name is Yeh Shen.

Scene 2

Stepmother's House

Ancestor 3: Yeh Shen is a kind girl.
Ancestor 1: Once she created beautiful pottery.
Ancestor 2: But now she has no time.
Stepmother: Yeh Shen, we need 20 pails of water!
Yeh Shen (patiently): Yes, Stepmother, I'll go to the well.
Jin-Li: Make her go to the deepest, darkest lake, Mother.
Stepmother: Good idea, Jin-Li. The water there is as cold as death.
Ancestor 3: Yeh Shen hikes up a **treacherous** mountain path.
Ancestor 1: As she draws water into her pail . . .
Ancestor 2: she captures a tiny fish with red fins and golden eyes.
Yeh Shen: What a dear, sweet creature! You look frightened.
Fish: No, but I am hungry.
Yeh Shen (surprised): Oh my, you can speak!
Fish: I am called Yu.
Yeh Shen: That means **abundance**.
Fish: But the only thing abundant here is water. There's no food.
Yeh Shen: I know what it's like to be hungry.
Ancestor 3: Although nearly starving herself . . .
Ancestor 1: Yeh Shen shares what little rice she has with the tiny fish.
Ancestor 2: She returns every day.
Ancestor 3: In time, her only friend grows into



France: "Cinderella"
Main Character: Cinderella
Helper: Fairy Godmother



a magnificent carp.

Ancestor 1: Jin-Li becomes suspicious and confides in her mother.

Jin-Li (*grumbling*): We work her to death, yet she's as cheerful as a lark.

Stepmother: Hmm. Maybe she has a secret. Let's follow her.

Ancestor 2: From behind a grove of bamboo, they spy on Yeh Shen.

Stepmother: A talking fish!

Jin-Li: Mother, they're laughing. Probably making fun of us.

Stepmother (*slyly*): I know a way we can erase Yeh Shen's smile for good.

Scene 3

A Day Later, at the Lake

Ancestor 3: Yeh Shen kneels at the water's edge.

Yeh Shen: Yu! Where are you, Yu? I have a few

grains of rice.

Ancestor 1: But Yu does not appear.

Yeh Shen: This is strange.

Ancestor 2: Ancestor, go to her now. Tell her.

Ancestor 3 (*sorrowfully*): Yeh Shen, I appear before you with sad news.

Ancestor 1: Yeh Shen looks up to see a spirit wearing a long, flowing robe.

Yeh Shen: Honorable Ancestor, have you come to tell me about my friend, Yu?

Ancestor 2: Yes. Your stepmother killed your precious fish. He has been eaten.

Yeh Shen (*horrified*): How could she?

Ancestor 3: Find your friend's bones. They have a powerful magic. Keep them safe.

Ancestor 1: Yeh Shen discovers the fish's bones in Stepmother's trash heap.

Ancestor 2: She places them in the finest glazed pot she ever made.

Yeh Shen (*whispering*): Precious bones, you shall be safe here under my bed.

Scene 4

Stepmother's Dressing Room

Ancestor 3: For the New Year's Festival, Stepmother buys new clothes for herself and Jin-Li.

Ancestor 1: But for Yeh Shen, there is nothing.

Yeh Shen (*wistfully*): May I go to the New Year's Festival too?

Jin-Li: In that ragged dress? You'd be tossed out by your pigtails!

Ancestor 2: Stepmother and Jin-Li giggle, their fans fluttering like butterflies.

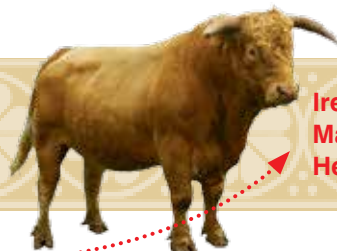
Ancestor 3: After they depart, Yeh Shen retrieves the hidden bones.

Yeh Shen: How I wish I could go to the festival. Can you help me?

South Africa: "Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters"

Main Character: Nyasha

Helper: a little green snake



Ireland: "The Irish Cinderlad"

Main Character: Becan (a boy!)

Helper: a magical bull

Ancestor 1: The pot of bones begins to glow.

A light surrounds Yeh Shen.

Ancestor 2: Suddenly, she is wearing a jade-green dress.

Yeh Shen (*looking down*): Thank you, magic bones—and such beautiful golden slippers!

Ancestor 3: Honorable Ancestor appears before Yeh Shen.

Ancestor 1: Be sure not to lose them, or the magic will be lost.

Ancestor 2: She bows to Ancestor and rushes into the night.

Scene 5

The New Year's Festival

Ancestor 3: Under a canopy of red lanterns, there is music and laughter.

Ancestor 1: Yeh Shen joins the celebration.

Ancestor 2: A servant approaches several guests with a platter of treats.

Guest 1: Look, mandarin cakes and watermelon seeds. May I pass you some?

Guest 2: Oh yes, I must eat them for good luck.

Guest 1: Not you. This charming creature in the jade-green dress.

Yeh Shen: Please, sir, have them.

Ancestor 3: Admiring guests quickly surround Yeh Shen.

Guest 1 (*whispering*): Who is she?

Guest 2: I've never seen her before.

Guest 3: Look at the gold embroidery on those slippers!

Guest 1: It reminds me of fish scales.

Ancestor 1: Jin-Li and Stepmother elbow their way in for a closer look.

Stepmother: I've never seen such tiny feet.

Jin-Li (*whining*): Mother, she's getting all the attention.

Stepmother: Well, do something!

Ancestor 2: Jin-Li steps on Yeh Shen's toes.

Yeh Shen: Ow!

Jin-Li: You look familiar.

Ancestor 3: Yeh Shen freezes, then turns and flees . . .

Ancestor 1: leaving behind one of her golden slippers.

Ancestor 2: Once home, she hides her dress and one slipper under the bed.

Ancestor 3: With the other slipper lost, the bones in her glazed pot no longer glow.

Scene 6

Stepmother's House

Ancestor 1: The next day, two noblemen barge into Stepmother's house.

Nobleman 1 (*bellowing*): Prince Renshu heard of an **enchanting** lady at the festival.

Nobleman 2: He wishes to meet her.

Nobleman 1: She left behind this golden slipper.



Ancestor 2: Jin-Li grabs it.

Jin-Li: Oh, that's mine!

Nobleman 2: Hah! You're the 75th lady to claim it.

Nobleman 1: Please try it on.

Ancestor 3: Jin-Li tries to cram her foot in, but two toes stick out.

Stepmother (*defensively*): My daughter's feet are swollen from dancing last night.

Nobleman 2: Others have used the same excuse.

Nobleman 1: Are there more young ladies in the house?

Jin-Li: Ladies in the house? No—goodbye!

Stepmother: Jin-Li, you are correct. Yeh Shen is in the courtyard, not in the house.

Jin-Li: And besides, *she's* not a lady.

Scene 7

The Pavilion, Months Later

Ancestor 1: Hundreds of feet wedge into the golden slipper, but not one fits.

Prince: I, Prince Renshu, will build a **pavilion** to display the slipper.

Guard: Your Majesty, let us hide nearby to see who claims it.

Ancestor 2: One evening, Yeh Shen passes by the pavilion.

Yeh Shen: My slipper! If I place it in my pot, will the bones glow again?

Ancestor 3: She takes it and hurries home.

Ancestor 1: Prince Renshu and two guards follow her to Stepmother's house.

Prince (*commanding*): Arrest this thief in rags who stole the golden slipper.

Stepmother: Yeh Shen, you're a disgrace to our family!

Jin-Li: Mother, if she goes to prison, who will wait on us?

Ancestor 2: The guards reach for Yeh Shen.

Yeh Shen: No, wait! Let me prove it's mine!

Ancestor 3: She slides the tiny slipper onto her foot.

Prince: It fits perfectly. How can this be?

Yeh Shen: I'll show you.

Ancestor 1: Yeh Shen rushes out and returns wearing the jade-green dress and both slippers.

Yeh Shen: Your Highness, one day a fish spoke to me . . .

Ancestor 2: As Yeh Shen tells her story, the prince falls in love with her kind nature . . .

Ancestor 3: and she no longer feels alone.

Ancestor 1: Their wedding lasts for seven days.

Ancestor 2: Yeh Shen even invites Stepmother and Jin-Li.

Yeh Shen: My father often told me to forgive.

Ancestor 3: After the wedding, Yeh Shen and the prince travel to the lake.

Yeh Shen: Dear fish, I honor you and return your bones to the water.

Ancestor 1: To this day, the spirit of a golden-eyed fish swims in a cool, deep lake.

Ancestor 2: And the story of Yeh Shen continues to be told . . .

Ancestor 3: as it has for more than 1,000 years.

Ancestor 1: Our Yeh Shen is one of the first Cinderellas . . .

Ancestor 2: but like ripples in a lake, her story travels outward . . .

Ancestor 3: changing with those who tell it.

Yeh Shen (*to audience*): Which story do you know? 🌸

READ AND WRITE!

In what ways is Yeh Shen treated unfairly in this play? What big idea do you think comes out of the story's happy ending? Use details from the play to write a well-organized essay.