

**The Garden of Empress Cassia
Teachers' Notes**

**by Senka King
Deputy Principal St Albans East Primary School**

Text: Wang, Gabrielle “The Garden of Empress Cassia” 2002 Puffin Books, Penguin Books Australia Ltd

Chapter no, pages & title	Key Points	Terminology	Language
<p>1. pp 1-6 The shop of Strange Smells</p>	<p>Story A young Chinese girl in Australia, who is denying her Chinese heritage in preference to being Australian. Good student but she is having problems at school with bullying.</p> <p>Characters: Mimi Lu: young girl (primary age?), pigtails, ‘strange smell’ about her, nickname: Smelly-Loo, being bullied at school because she ‘smells different’, has not told her parents (p2 ‘They wouldn’t understand.’) Mimi Lu’s mum: encourage Mimi to be proud of her Chinese heritage Mimi Lu’s dad: Chinese herbalist, wears white coat, high expectations of Mimi (p6 ‘98 for maths test...not good enough’) Miss Sternhop: patient, walking stick, solid build, thin lips, has arthritis, teacher- ‘in my class last year’ (p4) Miss O’Dell: art teacher, gives Mimi art lessons after school, believes in her artistic talent Setting: Australia? p1 ‘tomato sauce’, ‘stench of BO’, ‘I’m Australian not Chinese’ (p5) two-storey shop, no garden, only footpath out on the street (p2), kitchen: laminex table, red curtains separating the shop from living quarters (p2)</p>	<p>p1 brews p2 laminex, <i>chiaroscuro</i> p3 antique p4 arthritis p5 defiantly p6 honour, ancestors, incense, criticise</p>	<p>p1 “<i>two-storey shop that seemed to float on a cloud of strange smells.</i>” p3 ‘<i>solid lady with short, straight brown hair & 2 massive trunks for legs</i>’ p5 ‘<i>strode out to join the stream of life on the street</i>’</p>
<p>2. pp 7-14 The Gift</p>	<p>Characters: Josh Rudd: popular amongst peers, broad, smiling face, spiky, fair hair, voice changing, untidy, calls Mimi – M. Gemma Johnson: leader of the cool group, ponytail swinging, jealous of Mimi because she sat next to Josh in class (p9) Phoebe & Eliza her offsidiers. p11 ‘I hate being a banana.....yellow on the outside an white on the inside.’ Mimi talking to Miss. O’Dell. Gemma, Phoebe & Eliza make fun of Mimi for having different lunches – fried rice not sandwiches. Miss O’Dell tells Mimi to come in at lunchtime to have her</p>	<p>p9 grimaced, thermos, p10 primitive, sterilised, civilised, chorused, bulbous p14 impulsively, brimming</p>	<p>p7 ‘<i>trams were banked up along the track like large green caterpillars playing follow the leader.</i>’ ‘<i>black wires playing noughts and crosses against the sky.</i>’ p8 ‘<i>Miss O’Dell’s rosy cheeks stood out like little pink balloons</i>’ p9 Josh’s books ‘<i>slowly spread, like molten lava</i>’ p10 ‘<i>the brushes standing up in their containers like bunches of hairy flowers.</i>’</p>

	lessons & gives her a set of pastels. Only Mimi is allowed to use them.		<i>p11 'lips studded with drawing pins'</i>
3. pp 15-22 Four Seasons in a Day	<p>Mimi's dad goes to Sydney, uncle Ting in hospital, dying. Mimi loved to draw when she was sad, angry or happy. Begins to draw on the footpath....pond, waves, impressed with the amount of detail and how beautiful her drawing on the footbath looks. Continues to draw next day, all day and many observers loose themselves in the pictures...p20 one man says 'beautiful day for a swim' even though there were clouds in the sky.</p> <p>p18 Phoebe & Gemma tease her, but Mimi can't fight back until Gemma takes an interest in her pastels.</p> <p>Observant...Mimi knows all the regular shoppers by the sound their shoes.</p> <p>Mr Holes homeless person who slept in doorways and dumpsters.</p> <p><i>Wonderings...why can't she stand up for herself against Phoebe & Gemma?</i></p>	<p>p15 Tang dynasty</p> <p>p18 smirk, swarming, gaping</p> <p>p21 lull, cascading, dusk, yin yang symbol, ancient, Buddhist, vegetarian, stupor</p>	<p>p15 ;word rolling off his tongue like a polished pearl.'</p> <p>p16 'lose face' – uncle</p> <p>p16 'draw as freely as an eagle catching thermals in a clear blue sky'</p> <p>p17 'tails, bobbed on the water like fluffy white meringues.'</p> <p>p19 'big black blobs of chewing gum that freckled the ground'</p> <p>'spring flowers bursting into full bloom'</p> <p>'pastel the colour of velvet moss on a rainforest floor in the early morning'</p> <p>'crisp cool spring day'</p> <p>'passerby stopped to look into the painting'</p> <p>'Mr Holes... his coat was so full of holes it looked like mice had mistaken it for cheese'</p> <p>p20 'his dreadlocks wriggled like thick, curly worms'</p> <p>'beach streaked with seaweed and dotted with laughing children...above them, seagulls caught crusts in mid-air'</p> <p>'distant memory had been awakened'</p> <p>p20 'perfume of roses floated in the air'</p>
4. pp 23-33 Mrs Lu's Teahouse	<p>The news spreads about Mimi's beautiful Garden of Four Seasons and a crowd gathers. Picture takes mum back to her younger years & she decides to open a teahouse so she can make some money while M's dad is away.</p> <p>Josh turns up to see the garden and agrees that a teahouse is a good idea, Mimi didn't....café. Josh helps to make dumplings and they all have fun.</p> <p>p28 Teahouse, instant success. Neighbours discovered each other and business has improved. Mimi & Josh served food.</p>	<p>p23 infectious, Picasso</p> <p>p23 cultural revolution, Chairman Mao, lattice, ginkgo tree,</p>	<p>p23 'news...travelled like an infectious yawn'</p> <p>p24 'a loudspeaker was spitting out slogans'</p> <p>'fan shaped leaves fell to the ground like golden snowflakes'</p> <p>p25 'his hair was gelled to look intentionally untidy'</p> <p>p27 'powdery missile hit Mrs Lu smack on the side of the face'</p>

	<p>Wattle Valley Whisper wrote an article about Mimi. Mimi – 12yrs old</p> <p>Characters Mr Honeybun Alma</p> <p>Miss O'Dell asks Mimi to draw a mural on the Art room wall. The prep children can hear the bees and bats, children in the mural, principal can't and says children have a great imagination.</p>	<p>awkward, mahjong p27 intently, bamboo p31 dawdle, quiver p32 intrigued, minute detail, devious,</p>	<p>'your dumpling now look like podgy little caterpillar but one day they change into beautiful butterfly like mine' 'steam belched through the woven lid like a dragon all fired up' p30 'his eyebrows shot up like two bushy possum tails' 'picked up his chopsticks and chased a dumpling around the plate as if it were alive' p31 'the mural seemed to quiver as llife stirred within' p32 'a devious smile pricked the corners of her mouth'</p>
<p>5. pp 34- 45 The Garden of Empress Cassia</p>	<p>Uncle Ting dies. Mimi draws the Garden of Empress Cassia. p38 She bumps into Miss Sternhop who calls her drawing grafitti and starts rubbing out the words with her foot. She falls down and Mimi helps to take her through the garden which brings back memories of a plane crash. She tells Mimi about hw she wanted to become a pilot but didn't because her dad disapproved....girls didn't do things like that. p44 Miss S. looses her walking stick but doesn't need it anymore. Many people loose themselves in the garden and it continues to bring back pleasant memories eg. Mrs Jacobs remembered leaving her ring behind some loose bricks in '78. p44 Mr Holes – different – jeans & checked shirt, finish law degree</p>	<p>p38 vast, pavilions temple, terrace, monks, p40 nano-second p41 southern hemisphere, degree</p>	<p>p34 'stars winked at her' 'the purr of the traffic was becoming a roar' p36 'Miss Sternhop's voice sliced the air like broken pieces of glass' p38 'willow trees dipped their long green plaits into the lake, while lazy goldfish kissed the underside of the water looking for insects' 'the garden...surrounded by a long wall, its top snaking like a flying dragon'</p>
<p>6. pp 46-53 Awakening the Dragon</p>	<p>p46 Chinese New Year: year of the dragon (p52 next year, snake), \$40 – lucky money from mum. p47 Mimi doesn't want to participate in New Year Dragon Parade, embarrassed. Josh talks her into participating. p49 Chinese New Year, Dragon comes to bless people and chase away evil spirits. Mimi and Josh participate in parade.</p>	<p>p47 embroidered, reluctantly p48 carp, Taoist, ancient, feng shui, altar</p>	<p>p47 ' simple red silk dress with a high collar and tiny embroidered butterflies dancing across the front.' p48 'Dragon has the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, the beard of a goat, the scales of a fish, the teeth of a tiger and the tail of a carp.' p50 'she craned her neck to catch another glimpse</p>

	p52 Man in a pig mask gives Mimi a note to 'meet Mr Ma' Mimi enjoys parade for the first time.	table, incense p49 dialect p50 craned, precision p51 papier- mache, lantern, ceremonial, procession	...' p50 'the lion's orange tasselled mane danced through the still air like shooting flames' p51 'firecrackers danced around Mimi's feet, exploding into tiny orange sparks'
7. 54-60 The Story of Empress Cassia	Mimi goes to see Old Ma (Mr Ma). He tells her about Empress Cassia and how she saved her people by hiding them in the garden. He warns her that the pastels are magic and that they reflect the goodness in people's hearts. If the pastels get into the hands of someone with a 'bad heart' the pastels are dangerous.	p54 gritty, timidly, raspy p55 musty p56 barbarian p59 scroll, drizzle, miniature	p54 'pillars of gritty books and magazines towered on dusty shelves' p55 'his body was so small and the chair so big and clumsy, in the dim light he looked as though he were perched in the mouth of a giant hippopotamus' 'Mimi caught a giggle in her throat' 'he spoke in a voice like rusty old nails' 'the pale yellow liquid slipped like silken honey into the tiny cups' p56 'rosebud lips and wide eyes and hair black like night' p60 '
8. pp 61-65 Dr Lu's Return	Mimi's dad returns from Sydney, brining a gift for Mimi from uncle Ting (dog, Peppy). Dr. Lu is surprised to see so many people in front of their house. Mimi gives her dad a big hug, first time ever. WHY? Mimi's father talks to her about his brother and how different they were to each other, but he was glad to have spent time with m=him before he died. Her father had changed. He wanted to ensure he did not make the same mistake with Mimi as he had with his brother.	p61 possession, milling, emperor, admiration p63 tinge, whimpering	p62 'the chair legs screeched angrily against the wooden floorboards' p63 'two bright brown eyes looked up at her like two bright stars through her bedroom window' p65 'Mimi could feel a warmth slowly melting the icy spaces between father and daughter.'
9. pp 66-74	Mimi was helping her dad measure out the herbs for Miss	p66 sprouted	p68 'wish me luck' she called rushing up the

<p>The Broken Promise</p>	<p>Sternhop, her health has improved and she is taking flying lessons, glider. Mimi's dad is puzzled about why she is so healthy...p68 'herbs not that strong'. Mimi explains that Miss S has been in the 'garden' and that only people who need to be healed can walk inside it. Gemma and her mum come to the shop and Mimi has to take Gemma to her room while her mum has a consultation. When Mimi is called to get the morning tea, Gemma steals the pastels. Mimi follows Gemma to her house first demanding, then pleading with her to give them back. She tries to warn her about the curse and the dangers of using the pastels. p74 Mimi is devastated and does not know how she is going to face Miss O'Dell.</p>	<p>p69 inscription p70 consultation, brew p71 placid, sarcastically, smirked</p>	<p>street as though she had wings on the backs of her heels. p71 'she put her hand out but snatched it back quickly when Peppy growled.' p74 'As Mimi walked home, she felt as though all her bones had splintered and her muscles had turned to jelly.' 'Mimi looked up at the sky swollen with sombre grey clouds.' 'wind lashed the electric power lines, playing them like a guitar.' 'Each drop like a silver bullet biting into her skin.'</p>
<p>10. pp 75-84 The Curse</p>	<p>Mimi cried all day as she watched the rain wash away the garden. When Josh arrives at her place, she tells him all about what happened. Mimi is confused about the way she feels, she thinks she is a bad person because she says it 'serves her right' p77. Josh convinces Mimi to tell Miss O'Dell. Josh thinks that Gemma is jealous.p78 Miss O'Dell fears for Gemma's safety because she once used the pastels. Her grandfather got them from Shanghai (p80). She drew horrible things. All the plants and bushes within a metre around the rock drawing had died and nothing has ever grown there since. Mimi & Josh looked for Gemma & Phoebe at the shopping mall with no luck. Mimi goes back home and then gets the idea that Gemma could be at Ghost Gum Park. She sets out to find her.</p>	<p>p75 rivulets, sighed p76 disbelief, determination p80 jade, pestered p81 sinister p82 dwindled, trickle p83 yin & yang</p>	<p>p75 'Mimi cried herself dry.' p76 'Mimi took a deep breath, then like a dam wall bursting' 'all became rivulets of murky colour that slipped over the curb and into the storm water drains that criss-crossed beneath the city.' p80 'the box sat amongst the dry old painting brushes, ink-stones and scrolls like a sunflower in a winter graveyard.' 'my mind filled with nightmarish visions' p82 'the usual stream of shoppers was dwindling to a trickle' p84 'a creeping fear began pricking her spine like a million icy needles'</p>
<p>11. pp 85-94 Ghost Gum Park</p>	<p>Mimi goes to the park to look for Gemma. There was a flood and as Mimi tried to jump from boulder to boulder but could not get across, slipping and hitting her knee. She heard screams. She found Gemma drawing a 'dark and terrifying garden' p89 Mimi tried to persuade the girls to stop and move away but they continued. Mimi grabbed Gemma around the waist and tried to stop her from being pulled into the garden. Phoebe tried to help by</p>	<p>p86 canopy, eerie, torrent p87 searing, repulsive, p89 scoffed , decipher,</p>	<p>p85 'there was only a fraction of a moon that night, partly covered with streaks of grey clouds with the occasional star struggling to shine through them.' p86 'the canopy of trees above created an eerie light.'</p>

	<p>grabbing Gemma's feet. Josh also turned up and together they finally pulled Gemma out of the garden.</p> <p>As they are walking out of the park, Gemma throws the pastels into the water. Mimi is devastated and Gemma tells her that she did everyone a favour because the pastels are evil.</p>	<p>devoured, inscription p90 putrid, undulating, hideous, fetid p92 mesmerised, writhing</p>	<p>p87 'a searing pain ripped through her knee' p89 'a great mass of clouds rose out of the garden. It had the force and the sound of a gigantic whirlwind. Out of these clouds appeared repulsive serpents with whipping tongues and blood red eyes. They crawled and twisted and devoured each other.' p90 'the garden had already begun sucking her into its putrid black mouth that opened and closed like a weeping sore.' p92 'her face was deathly pale' 'mesmerised with fear, her eyes were still fixed in terror on the writhing mass that was the Garden of Darkness'</p>
<p>12. pp 95-98 Sweet Dreaming</p>	<p>Mimi is disappointed and stays in bed. But then she realises that the garden is still inside her. She uses ordinary chalk and manages to draw the garden again, just as beautiful as with the magic pastels.</p>	<p>p96 whimpered, drastic p97 bellbird, gracefully p98 welled, pavilion</p>	<p>p95 'thought tumbled over and over in her mind like waves crashing on the shore.' 'Peppy, snuggled into the doona beside her, belly up, snoring loudly.' 'a hush silenced her thoughts' 'a shiny, clear thread of a thought' p97 'Mimi's mind was like a covering of freshly fallen snow' 'a young girl, with rosebud lips and wearing a gown of the finest yellow silk' p98 'the garden welled up inside her'</p>

Ideas for working with this text

Before starting – Identify: Where are my students in relation to reading skills, attitudes and behaviours? What do I need to help them with first?

Group Norms work hard, never give up, accept each other, do your best, and participate actively

Sign reading agreement no reading ahead

Reading Response Journals what are they? Purpose: A way for us to track our reading and thinking. How can we use them?

Discuss structure & purpose of reading sessions focus on comprehension-thinking about and understanding what we are reading, developing the 6 strategies, making our thinking during the reading process visible.

Predicting

Front cover – “I See I wonder” strategy List what you see on the front cover. What does it make you wonder?

Back cover – blurb: close activity

Read blurb. What do you know from the blurb? Does it match with anything you predicted from the front cover? What questions/wonderings do you have now? Does it sound like a book you might choose to read? Why / why not?

Reading Start with teacher reading, students to join in and take turns at reading as they can. Discuss characters, setting, story.

Chapter summary in student books: t-chart: chapter no & title, chapter summary & wonderings, new words, phrases

Reading strategies – What do good readers do? Make a group list. Start with the student’s contributions and add on ...Chris Tovani’s book.

Reinforce relevant strategies, add new ones to the list, as we read.

Character Web Whole class character web. Students to do own character web in books.

Paintings /pastel drawings of phrases. How does each person see the text? Why are our representations different?

Glossary – publish a glossary book, students to choose words and write a definition, pg no and how it is used in the book, a new sentence using the word and a small illustration. (ICT: publish on computer....use a master/template)

Map of the world Whole class & individual. Label and keep track of different places mentioned throughout text. Eg China – where Mimi’s family is from. Sydney – where dad goes to visit uncle. Galapagos Islands....etc

Authors style How would you describe the authors’ style? Why is the author using 2 fonts (normal & italic)?

Big Picture Concepts: what are the concepts in this text? Inclusivity, identity, bullying, friendship, multiculturalism, others...which of these do the students identify through the reading and which of these do I want to focus on with students?