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*Carolyn Treffinger , Kurt Wiese (Illustrator)*

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Banished to a mountaintop to learn to grow rice, Li Lun proves his courage as he fights the elements and his own loneliness to make his rice seedlings flourish where no one else has for generations.

## Li Lun, Lad of Courage Details

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Author : Carolyn Treffinger , Kurt Wiese (Illustrator)

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## From Reader Review Li Lun, Lad of Courage for online ebook

### Josiah says

*Li Lun, Lad of Courage* is a short book, and very straightforward, but it does a good job of melding an interesting story of Chinese culture with a tale about feeling fear and overcoming the hurt that being labeled a coward will bring by proving one's internal bravery in one's own way.

To me, what makes Li Lun as compelling a character as he is, is the fact that he is totally ordinary. I didn't sense any kind of above-and-beyond courage on his part in this book; what made him brave was his willingness to accept the challenges presented to him, regardless of how severe they were, and to turn the opportunities he was given into a better future for himself.

Li Lun lives in a small Chinese fishing village, where a man's (or boy's) worth is generally measured by his ability to catch fish on the family boats. However, as desperately as Li Lun longs to please his father (Teng Lun), the boy is terrified of the sea and wants no part at all of the life that a fisherman leads. Ashamed and derided by those around him, Li Lun dares to disobey his father's direct imperative to join him in his boat to leave for their fishing trip. At the intercession of Li Lun's mother (Wang Lun) to prevent an even worse punishment, Teng Lun angrily gives Li Lun the almost impossible task of growing rice on the mountain Lao Shan, as far from the water as it is possible to get. In this way begins Li Lun's journey toward an achievement that seems far too difficult for any child, but which could prove to everyone around him—including Li Lun, himself—that he is not a coward, but is as brave as any other in the village.

I have never heard of any other stories by author Carolyn Treffinger, but in this book at least, she is a beautifully expressive and sympathetic writer, leading with a calm, careful hand the narrative of Li Lun's experiences. This is a story that anyone who has ever felt afraid of something that others around them considered trivial will identify with right away, feeling the same things that Li Lun feels as he treks onward in hopes of earning the elusive respect of his father. Overall, the plot feels like a modern retelling of an old-fashioned fable, but with a lot of extra depth and richer characters.

I would recommend this book as a basic study of Chinese culture, an exciting coming-of-age story, or a catharsis for anyone whose personal courage has ever failed them, and who would like to try again where they have previously faltered. *Li Lun, Lad of Courage* certainly is an inspiring story, and I would give it two and a half stars.

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### Karen says

Read early for CC1 wk#9. This book reminded us of "Call it Courage" by Armstrong Perry. We all enjoyed reading about Li Lun's ability to complete his task in the face of many obstacles and how he over came those obstacles.

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### Ben says

This was a classic, good old-fashioned tale from a coastal Chinese fishing village. People that aspire to a post-modern tradition may pooh-pooh moralistic tales such as these, but I fully embrace the strong and clear messages that are conveyed. The solitude of Li Lun's ordeal is daunting, but he successfully works through

myriad challenges, even as almost all of his rice plants get ruined by seagulls and rats. One of the most important lessons that resonates very strongly is how being open about our own weaknesses and communicating helps us move forward with greater strength. It was too bad he couldn't save either of the seagull chicks to keep him company, but it was a fun and short read.

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### **K. says**

Hey, JoAnne, I think this is a good candidate for the read-aloud!

This book is highly reminiscent of "Call It Courage," but has worth all it's own, as the main characters of each book are very different and are set on their tasks for different internal reasons.

This book is a great little look at a portion of Chinese culture (I think, I mean, I don't really know if that statement is a fact, as I don't know enough about Chinese culture), but it seems like it. That was a really lame general statement. Okay, how about this: this book is a nice look at what the culture on a small Chinese island could have looked like in the early part of the 1900's. Better?

From other books I've read that deal with China & her people, one thing I can say I've noticed about the culture that recurs in this book is the respect for parents/elders, total and unquestioning obedience of children, stalwart perseverance and a non-complaining attitude under great hardship. This book contains these elements perfectly.

I adored the names by which Li Lun thought of his mother, Precious mother, Beautiful mother, etc. This was a really great little book, wonderfully written.

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JoAnne, if we could find suitable books, it might be fun to think about doing a "cultural" read-aloud next year. "Call It Courage" for Polynesian, this one for Chinese and so on?? Just an idea.

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### **Katie says**

I am probably giving up adult lit for a while, as the kids' new language/history program (which I am excited about) has me reading to them from 2 or 3 books at a time the whole year. That may be all the reading I get in! Our theme this year is "The Eastern Hemisphere," beginning with China. This was the first book we read for the year, and it was a good one! I LOVE the opportunity to read these stories that are so largely based on themes of honor, gratitude, respect, etc. This was a (relatively) quick read that we all enjoyed.

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### **Hao Zui says**

Nice story, not great writing.

The premise of the story is pretty original and actually captivating. The story quickly becomes dull, however, even in this short, short book. The middle of the book is repetitive. Regarding the writing, it feels very awkward in tone, mostly due to strange vocabulary. For instance, the writer uses the word "gulp" when

talking about eating food towards the end. There lies some awkwardness also in the formality of the dialogue, but this is more excusable. Outside of the dialogue it seemed like it needed a good editor who would reduce some of the embellishment for a more natural tone.

While there is some charm to the book, it has little meaning. There are emotional parts, but they don't ultimately lead to anything. The ending (especially the last page) resolves very little. Though we see growth in Li Lun, the reader is left wondering what the point is. The last sentence in particular is horrendously corny. Imagine if a serious horror movie were to end abruptly with the line, "This has been the day of all the blood." It would be unbelievably tacky.

With all these criticisms, there was some heart to the story. It was not difficult to sympathize with Li Lun, but with a more interesting message than "Do your own thing and become strong," executed more thoroughly would have better tied things together. As it is, I'm not sure the book earned its award.

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### **Cheryl says**

Well, this is a fine read, quick, lively, interesting. The illustrations by Kurt Wiese are super and really enhance the story.

However, there's so much here that's so very similar to Call It Courage that it feels to me as if I'm reading two entries in a series called 'brave boys on foreign islands' or something!

But I've decided to rate it unto itself, and give it 3.5 stars, rounded up because I really liked the adult characters even though I wouldn't have noticed them much as a child reader.

Newbery Honor discussion Jan 2017 in Children's Books group.

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### **Wendy says**

I loved this book so much that I used it to teach Special Ed students during a literacy class. It talks about fear, family ties, culture sociology and psychology of human nature. It is a great book that teaches one how to live up to their convictions and work hard at whatever they choose to do in life even if it is not the norm of society.

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### **Jenny says**

I'm both impressed with Li Lun's courage and problem solving and saddened by his father's harshness. I know it was a different time and a different culture, but to send your young son to grow rice on the top of a mountain alone just because he is scared to fish seems way beyond unnecessarily harsh. Aside from that aspect though, I ended up enjoying Li Lun's determination to survive, to protect his rice plants, and to solve each problem he faced.

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### **Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says**

My father found this book in the town dump when I was a kid and brought it home for me. Can you imagine - a Newbery honor book in the dump?? Anyway, I loved it and still have it and ought to reread it.

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### **Victoria says**

I think this is a good way to explain how a fishing community in China might live to your children (who live in the US). Also when I read this to my boys it helped them understand hard work and persistence. I feel that showing them hard working children in books can be a bit of a motivator and inspiration to a generation who seems to think a lot about themselves and getting things immediately.

There are some issues I have with this book though. The main character is disobedient but he also doesn't have a very understanding father. There is a lack of communication between the two, and that is really sad. I find that the idea of a child traveling on his own to a mountain to do something for a few months without supervision when the main character is only about ten is really frightening too. Was the father just taunting and sending his son away to die? Also I feel there was no resolve between their relationship at the end even.

My sons enjoyed this book a little more than I did. I'd give it more like 2.5 stars while they'd give it about 3.5. Therefore I averaged it out for this review.

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### **Jennifer (JenIsNotaBookSnob) says**

Interesting book, one of those though where you wonder how culturally accurate it is being written by someone who was not a member of the culture they are writing about. Of course, sometimes you just want to read a story and set the politics of the thing aside for awhile.

Whether or not it resembles the culture it is supposed to portray, it is still an interesting read. I'm sure modern people look at sending a boy up a mountain to grow rice as rather extreme parenting. Though, I'm sure it would have sounded less extreme in the 1940's when the book was written especially taking into account that they were on an island. He wasn't going to get lost in the wilderness and he could always have given up and gone home. He could see home from his high vantage point. That detail makes it feel like a more believable work.

Anyone who has tried to grow a tomato plant on their patio can relate to some of Li Lun's struggles in a small way. I'm an adult, but I still remember trying to please my parents and hoping they wouldn't be disappointed in me. I probably still feel that way to some extent.

On the bright side, it is also not a particularly long work of juvenile fiction. Even if you don't like it, at least you haven't spent too long on it. :)

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### **Jess says**

Great little story for kids about courage and perseverance.

## Manybooks says

While I do in some if not actually in many ways consider Carolyn Treffinger's Li Lun: Lad of Courage both readable and inspiring (that is to say I find the main protagonist's, I find Li Lun's courage, his inventiveness and his skills at solving the multitude of problems that his being sent to plant and grow rice on the unforgiving and harsh mountaintop have engendered, impressive), I am also lastingly and very much angered by the father's ruthless stubbornness and that family "honour" seems to be more important and essential to and for him than even the health and welfare, the life of his son, not to mention that I am also massively saddened by the fact that even Li Lun's mother (although definitely more sympathetic towards her son) is obviously too meek and too cowed by the father's role as pater familias to be both able and even all that willing to much intercede. And really, even considering that Li Lun: Lad of Courage is supposed to take place at a time when obeying and honouring one's parents, one's family (and family members' wishes, their demands) was likely generally still the accepted norm, for the father to not be able to even remotely comprehend and accept that Li Lun is actually and legitimately afraid of the sea, and to harshly and yes, dangerously, banish him to the mountaintop because of this (and that the father is simply unwilling to even fathom that due to his fear of the sea, Li Lun does, of course, not want to become a fisherman), all this does not only seem unnecessarily harsh to the extreme, to me and for me, it almost seems as though the father is actually hoping that his son will not come back, that Li Lun will disappear.

And while I most certainly did end up enjoying reading about Li Lun's struggles, his courage and how he survives, how he thrives and manages to plant and grow his required and demanded rice, the father's and by extension also the mother's behaviours and actions did leave and still do retain a more than slightly bitter and nasty aftertaste (not enough for me to despise Li Lun: Lad of Courage, but definitely enough for me to only consider a high two star rating, as even at the end of the novel, Li Lun's father is ONLY proud and happy because his son has succeeded planting and growing the rice, and NEVER even remotely considers apologising, never considers his own nastiness and harshness towards his son as having possibly been unacceptable, that his demands and dictates of and towards his son might have been much too harsh, and were in fact potentially dangerous and therefore not at all appropriate by any and all stretches of my imagination).

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## Tiffany says

What an amazing story of courage. We felt we were right there with Li Lun as he worked hard to make the rice grow. My kids were on the edge of their seats at the end of the story, anxious to see how Li Lun's actions would be accepted by the townspeople and more importantly, by his family! His courage and recognition brought tears to my eyes and I felt such pride for him. My oldest daughter said the ending was horrible. She really wanted Li Lun's dad to recognize his accomplishment. That being said, the acknowledgment of the mother was tender and sweet.

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