Second Reaction: A Call from the Mountain Villages


Gloria Chen

I. In what ways does this book lend itself to sharing with young readers?

I read the Penguin edition of *Three Cups of Tea* in 2008. I was deeply touched by the passion and the commitment of Greg Mortenson in building a school for the remote village of Korphe in the war-battered Pakistan. After I read the book, I shared my thoughts to many adult friends as well as to my ELL students at North Side High School. Some of my
students were so encouraged that they checked out books from the library to read. When *First Opinions, Second Reactions* journal invited me to write book reviews for *The Young Reader’s Edition* of the same book and the picture book *Listen to the Wind*, I was ready to engage my students in reading these two simplified books. Due to time limitations, we only spent three days reviewing and discussing the books, although many students have done research on the Penguin edition and knew the story of Mortenson and the villagers in Korphe, and they were very enthusiastic in participating in this venture.

First I read *Listen to the Wind* to my Level 2 ELL students, page by page, with slow pace, showing them all the sentences and collages. After I read the book, students were divided into small groups and each group had a topic to discuss:

a. How do you relate to the villagers, especially the children, in Korphe?

b. Do you know anyone who has helped you with your education like Dr. Greg?

c. Our school, North Side High School, is facing a possibility of being closed and changed to a charter school. As a community (like people in Korphe Village), what can we do to “re-build” our school?

In my ELL Level 3 class of thirteen students, most of whom were my students last year, first I helped them to recall the story of *Three Cups of Tea* I told them last semester, followed by read-aloud of the picture book *Listen to the Wind*. We then split the book into thirteen parts, and each student read one to two chapters. The second day, we held a “jigsaw” activity to summarize all twenty-two chapters of the book. After discussion of some details, each student shared their thoughts on what they read to their seat partners and then to the entire class in both writing and speaking.

II. Are there any reasons I do/do not want to share the book with my students?

I do not see any reasons not to share these books with my students. Although *Three Cups of Tea* is spotted with occasional terror and cruelty, my high school students can tolerate the text because of their mental and emotional maturity and their real-life encounters.

III. How did I engage readers with this book? How did I feel about the theme and text while working with it?

My ELL students are closely related to the books in many ways. First, many of them are Muslims from Pakistan, Sudan, Chad, Somalia, and Iraq. They have been through the similar situations the Korphe villagers have: poverty, hunger, coldness, lack of education and medication, and especially, wars and disasters. In addition, most of them have experienced support of people outside their communities, such as missionaries, religious groups, charities, and the United Nations. Even after they settled in the U.S., they constantly received...
help from the local people as well as teachers at our school. When I introduced the book to them for the first time, they showed strong interest and identified with the life experiences of the villagers in the book.

This year, our school, North Side High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, was placed on probation for the fourth year due to low ISTEP scores, and we are facing the possibility of having our school transformed into a charter school. Both faculty and students feel the pressure and are trying to rebuild our school. This book came as a timely inspiration of “building a learning community together.”

IV. What feedback did I receive from the young readers?

Here are samples of my students’ responses:

M. (Junior, from Sudan):
--Building a school is a great idea, because people need education to reach peace, but many people who want to help the needy are discouraged by lack of enthusiasm from the rich communities. I feel bad about Changazi's experiences.

J. (Sophomore, from Mexico):
--I am amazed this story began with someone's failure. I felt encouraged because I failed in many ways, too. I like the story of how three cups of tea made a stranger become someone like a family member.

O. (Freshman, from Mexico):
--I am wondering how Dr. Greg was hiking down the glacier. I have learned that a glacier is a frozen river that flows along the mountain. Dr. Greg must be a very venturous person. I think it was his venturous character that made him decide to build a school for the Korphe children. He is a real "climber."

K. (Sophomore, from Burma)
--The story is kind of sad because the kids didn't have a schoolhouse to go. I was so impressed that they went to school even when the teacher didn't show up. When I read that Greg Morteson visited the CAI schools at the refugee camps in Pakistan, I was reminded of my life in the refugee camp in Thailand. I cried when I read the person in Pakistan told Greg that they would provide land, stones, and everything. I can feel how much they wanted a school. I also felt sad that Hoerni couldn't see how students were studying in the new school.

J. (Sophomore, from Burma):
--I was surprised that the problems the villagers faced were so much like those we
had in Burma. The terror was great, and we were so afraid to go back. But I don’t believe New York is safer. I believe many people in New York feel like in a war zone, too. The difference is in Pakistan and Burma, the governments don’t care about their people, but here in the U.S., the government tries hard to protect the citizens.

P. (Sophomore, from Thailand):
--I am impressed by the person Haji, because I have a classmate with the same name. Perhaps it is a common Muslim name? Anyway, Haji was the chief in the village, or maybe he is like a pastor or a minister. I think the villagers viewed building the school as a sacred thing, so they had Haji mark the spot for the school building. But I like the idea to have Greg hammer the final nail on the roof.

M. (Sophomore, from Haiti):
--I want to know what CAI usually do to countries like Pakistan. CAI must have been important to Greg because he visited CAI schools at the refugee camps. Did he get some ideas of education there? Also, Greg gave an interview to a reporter who had gone with him to visit the Afghan refugee schools. Wow, he was doing research! I feel so good to see people are willing to help others, although they do not belong to the same race or the same nationality. But he has given up so much!

P. (Sophomore, from Thailand):
--This story made me think about the most important things in life: education, love, and peace. How do we get these? Cut our need of things!
--This book tells us about two countries—America and Pakistan. They are two very different countries, but Greg got used to the village life in Pakistan and go around places in Pakistan. When he traveled back to America, he could talk and work with many American rich people and asked money from them. He was amazing.

C. (Freshman, from Burma):
--I like Chapter 10 and Chapter 11. I admire Greg’s determination and his selflessness. He even cooked for those who were building the school! I like the story of how Greg met the pretty lady with short hair in the Foundation dinner. I knew he would end up marrying her.

A. (Junior, from Chad):
--I have learned a lot of things from people in Pakistan. There are many things that are similar to Chad. The religion is important. Hussein told his daughter that a school was going to be special and he was to be a teacher. He started to teach the children about their religion and the scripture. I am wondering why here in America we don’t do this.
V. What further activities or observations about this text occur to me now?

We decided to raise money to buy the book *Three Cups of Tea* for each of us.

**About the Author**

_Gloria Chen_ is currently an ELL teacher at North Side High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and a graduate student of English at Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne. She also teaches adults Chinese at IPFW.