

LANGUAGE ARTS: HANDOUT A1
Story Background for Cloze Activities
MONKEY AND THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST

The Monkey legends, like Arthurian legends in the West, comprise a large collection of different adventures which have accumulated around the characters who accompany Xuanzang (or Tripitaka) on his mythologized journey to retrieve sutras from the Western Paradise. In addition to the pilgrimage adventures, Monkey has a set of stories focusing on his birth and early life.

MONKEY'S EARLY LIFE:

Like many heroes, Monkey (or Sun Wu Kong) had an unusual birth, in his case springing from an egg-shaped stone. He was clever and strong and quickly became the king of the monkeys. But mere mortal life was not enough for him.

The Cloze activity for the Ji-Li Jiang's story takes place at the moment when Monkey sets off in search of new powers and the secret of immortality.

THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST:

Buddha asks the bodhisattva Guanyin (Indian: Avalokiteshvara) to help a virtuous pilgrim (Xuanzang) travel from China to the Western Paradise in order to receive Buddhist scriptures and carry them to eastern lands. On Guanyin's journey to Ch'ang-an to find the pilgrim, she overcomes two monsters in battle and delivers both a dragon and the Monkey King from punishment. These figures form a group of disciples who are assigned the duty of protecting Xuanzang on his dangerous journey.

The first monster Guanyin battles was formerly a minor god who accidentally broke a crystal cup while serving the Jade Emperor in Heaven. His monster shape and banishment were punishments for this crime. Guanyin offers to return him to his heavenly position if he helps and protects Xuanzang on his pilgrimage. The monster agrees to become the pilgrim's disciple and is dubbed Sandy Priest.

The second monster Guanyin encounters is also a minor god doing penance for minor crimes in heaven and likewise becomes a disciple on the pilgrimage. Because of his pig-like appearance and voracious appetite, Guanyin gives him the name, Pigsy.

The third creature Guanyin encounters is a dragon who has been suspended in the air as punishment for setting fire to his father's palace and destroying his magic pearls. Guanyin frees the dragon and in exchange he agrees to turn himself into a white horse for the pilgrim's journey.

Finally Guanyin arrives at the mountain where the Monkey King has been imprisoned for five hundred years after continually misbehaving in Heaven. Monkey agrees to mend his ways and become the pilgrim's disciple in exchange for his freedom. Monkey is extremely clever, brave, and strong. He carries a magical staff, has the power to transform himself into seventy-two different shapes, and can leap from cloud to cloud traveling 108,000 miles in a single somersault. But he remains monkey-like in his inability to control his mind and behavior. In order to help Xuanzang teach Monkey self-control, Guanyin gives the pilgrim a magical headband that will tighten painfully on Monkey's head when he loses control.

Xuanzang is given the religious name Tripitaka and sets out on his quest for the Buddhist sutras. With Monkey, Sandy Priest, Pigsy, and White Horse as protectors he encounters many adventures on his long trip to the Western Paradise. When the pilgrim and his disciples finally arrive, the Buddha gives them his sacred sutras to take back to China. Their self-cultivation on the journey and merit earned through good works are rewarded with immortal life and happiness.

The excerpt in the Cloze activity from David Kherdian's text recounts events early in the pilgrimage. Monkey has deserted Xuanzang after being scolded for losing his temper and killing a bandit. When he is finally convinced by the Dragon King of the Eastern Ocean to return to his duties, Xuanzang fits him with the magical headband, or "cap of discipline."