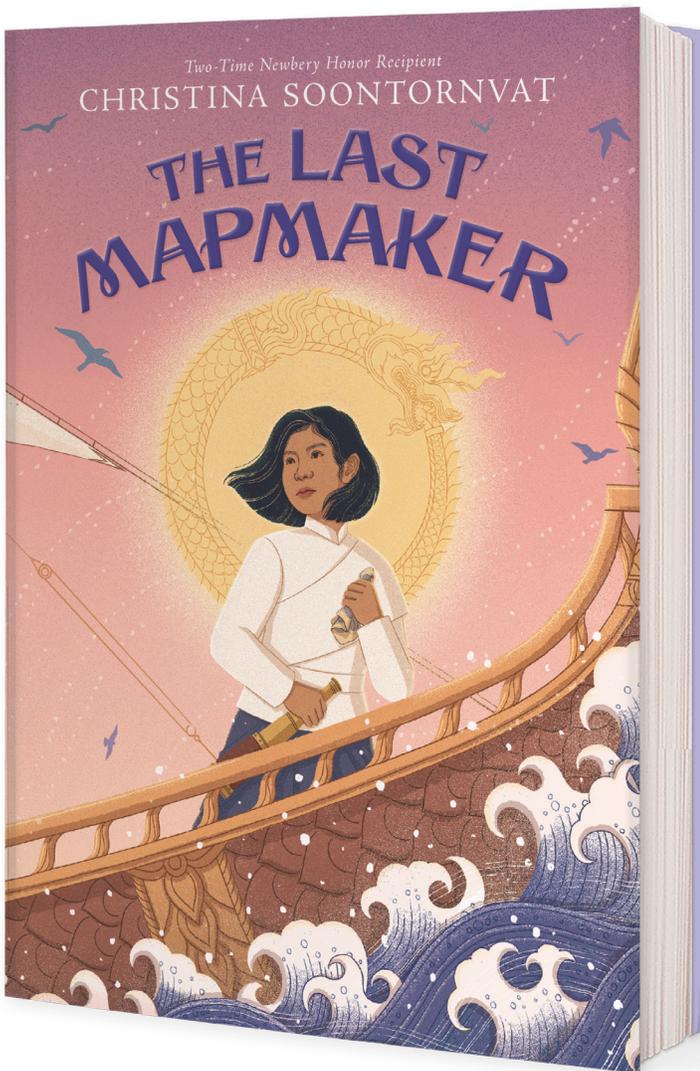


THE LAST MAPMAKER

CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT



As assistant to Mangkon's most celebrated mapmaker, twelve-year-old Sai acts like a well-bred young lady with a glittering future. In reality, her father is a poor conman. In a kingdom where status is everything, the truth could ruin her. Sai seizes the chance to join an expedition to chart the southern seas, but she isn't the only one aboard the *Prosperity* with secrets. When Sai learns that the ship might be heading for the fabled Sunderlands—a land of dragons, dangers, and riches beyond imagining—she must weigh the cost of her dreams. Vivid, suspenseful, and thought-provoking, this tale of identity and integrity is as beautiful and intricate as the maps of old.

About Christina Soontornvat



Christina Soontornvat grew up in a small Texas town, where she spent many childhood days behind the counter of her parents' Thai restaurant with her nose in a book. She is the author of many books for young readers, including the Newbery Honor Books *A Wish in the Dark* and *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team*, also a Robert F. Sibert Honor Book and a YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults finalist. Christina Soontornvat lives in Austin, Texas.

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Common Core Connections

This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



Discussion Questions

1. Describe Sai's background. Where does she live when the book opens? What is her father like? Discuss their relationship. How did Sai manage to get a job with Paiyoon? Talk about her strengths as well as some of the mistakes she makes in the story, using specific examples.
2. In the acknowledgments, the author mentions mentors and the gifts they bestow. How is Master Paiyoon a mentor to Sai? What does he teach her? What does he value about her? Explain why Sai thinks Paiyoon is overlooking important information on the maps during the sea journey. What is he really doing and why?
3. In Mangkon, how does status impact a person at a young age? What's the significance of a lineal? What does it mean for a person to have many versus very few (or no) lineals? What would a lineal mean to Sai? How would it have made her life different? Is there anything in our culture that is similar to lineals?
4. Who is Rian, and what is her background? Why is she important to the story? Discuss why Sai is so pleased when Rian befriends her and what Sai believes they have in common. What are Rian's goals? How does she go about trying to accomplish them? Describe her relationship with Sangra and how Rian exploits it. What happens to Rian in the end?
5. Describe Sangra, her past, and how she became captain of the ship. When does she appear to be harsh, and why is Paiyoon concerned about it? What is the secret from Sangra's past that makes the stop at Pitaya so important to her? What does Sangra hope for, and how much of that has been fulfilled by the story's end?
6. How does Sai meet Bo? Why does he stow away aboard the ship? Where does he hope to go, and why? What do they eventually like about each other? How do they work together to accomplish their goals? What is Bo's situation when the book ends?
7. Describe life aboard the ship. What makes it different from life in a city or town? What work needs to be done? What is the hierarchy, and how can the captain punish those who disobey her? Discuss what the sailors think about the expedition and how they disagree with one another. What does Grebe hope for? How does Dumpling feel about looking for the Sunderlands?
8. Bo says to Sai, "It's not easy keeping up a lie day in and day out" (page 197). What lie is he talking about? What does Sai know about keeping up lies for a long time? Talk about the lies, deceits, and secrets of various characters, including how Rian deceives others. What are some of the reasons that the characters lie? Discuss Sai's ability as a forger. How is forgery a form of deceit?
9. After Sai raises the alarm about Bo pickpocketing, she feels bad about snitching. She hears her father's voice saying, "Loyalty, Sai. Even a dog knows how important it is" (page 127). What does loyalty mean, and why does it matter? What is the relationship between loyalty and deceit? When else does it come up in the story? How do the adult whales show a form of loyalty to the captured baby whale?
10. In speaking of the phrase *The Tail Is the Teeth*, Sai says, "I had heard those words all my life. They meant that no matter how hard you tried, you couldn't escape who you were or where you came from" (page 39). How does she feel about that idea? In what way do the lineals symbolize it? Discuss Bo's attitude toward "all the lineal stuff" and its implication that he's "worth less than some other kid just because they wear a stupid metal bracelet" (page 196).
11. Master Paiyoon introduces Sai to the idea that Mangkon exploits other countries and uses up their resources. What are his examples? Why is he worried about the possibility of finding the Sunderlands? Why does he think the word "discovery" is used incorrectly? Can you think of examples of this in the real world? Discuss his comments on page 200 and relate them to Sangra's description of Mangkon as "an empire of cowards and thieves" (page 277).
12. Describe the Slake in the story. In what ways does the creature resemble animals in our world? What efforts does Sai take to protect the dragon? What efforts can we take to protect endangered species?



Classroom Activities

Maps as Magic

After Sai draws her first map, she says, “It felt like I had just performed a magic spell” (page 169). As a class, discuss why she would feel that way. Then brainstorm a list of types of maps, from road maps to topographic maps to diagrams of buildings. Have students work in pairs to create a visual project about maps to share with the class. The project could entail drawing or painting a map, creating a slide show about a type of map, giving a presentation using a map, making a papier-mâché globe, or another idea of yours or your students.

Reading a Map

Work with your students to show them how different types of maps can distort the perspective of landmass.

Mapmakers who create flat maps must figure out how to depict the 3D surface of the earth on a 2D plane. To demonstrate how challenging this is, give students a small orange or tangerine and ask them to peel it, trying to keep it all in one piece. Ask the students to place the peel flat on a piece of paper and discuss what they see. Next, have them compare a country on a globe with the same country on a flat map. Which landmasses appear larger on the flat map than they are on a globe? To illustrate this further, have students compare how many of a given country can fit into another country on a globe with how many can fit when using a flat map.

Make a Map

Have your students create maps based on their own made-up worlds. In small groups, have students invent a land and then create a map of where it is in the world. They should include the scale and a compass rose. Have them consider how the characteristics of their land are impacted by latitude and longitude. What would seasons be like at different locations? What animals would live in this world, and where would their habitats be found?

Just Like . . .

The author uses vivid figurative language to draw comparisons and create pictures in the reader’s imagination. Have students choose a chapter or two and write down examples of figurative language. They should select five examples to examine closely, writing a few sentences about the comparisons drawn and the effect on readers of the figures of speech.

Why Pay for It?

Master Paiyoon is describing colonialism when he talks about Mangkon conquering new places and using up their resources. He says, “Why pay for it when you can claim it and call it your own?” (page 200). Working as a class or in groups, have students research one country that was colonized by another. The research should focus on what the colonizing power gained, such as access to resources or labor, and the effect on the colonized country, including loss of language and culture. Discuss the wide-reaching effects of colonization, relating it to the novel.

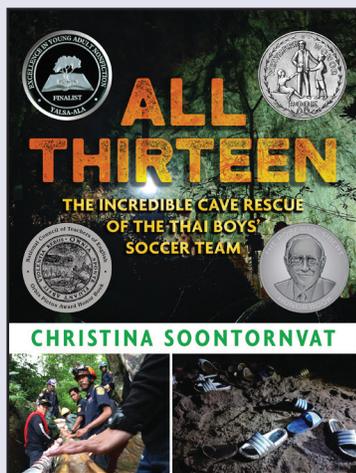
One-Word Summary

Invite each student to consider the novel and come up with a word to describe or summarize it. Once they've decided on a word, the students should write a few paragraphs explaining their choice, backing it up with specifics from the narrative. Then hold a class discussion to share and compare the choices.

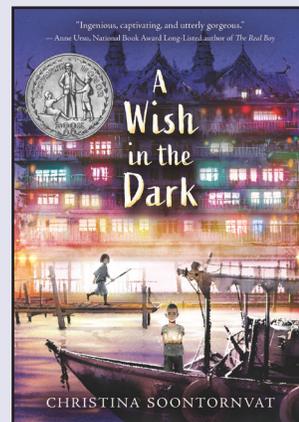
Compare and Contrast Characters

Ask each student to take any two important characters and create a Venn diagram to illustrate what the characters have in common and what is different about them. The points can be about their backgrounds, personalities, circumstances, actions in the stories, or other facts. The diagram should be large so that students can write a short sentence for each point they make.

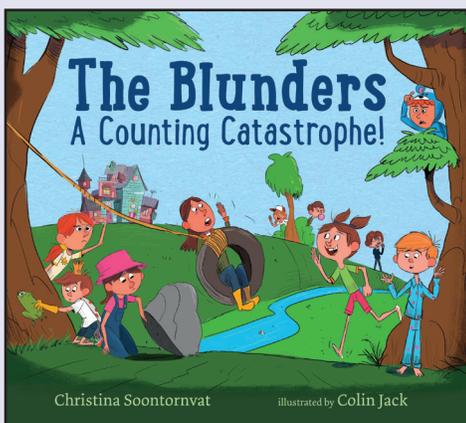
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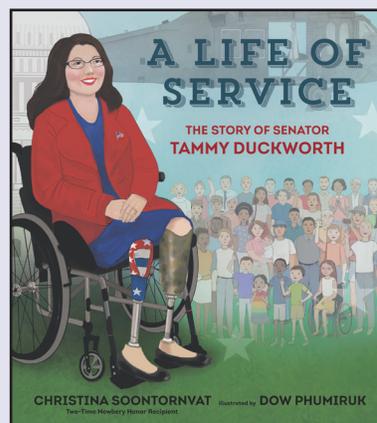
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These materials were prepared by Kathleen Odean with additional ideas from the American Booksellers Association. Kathleen Odean was a school librarian for more than fifteen years. She now gives professional development workshops for educators about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award committees.