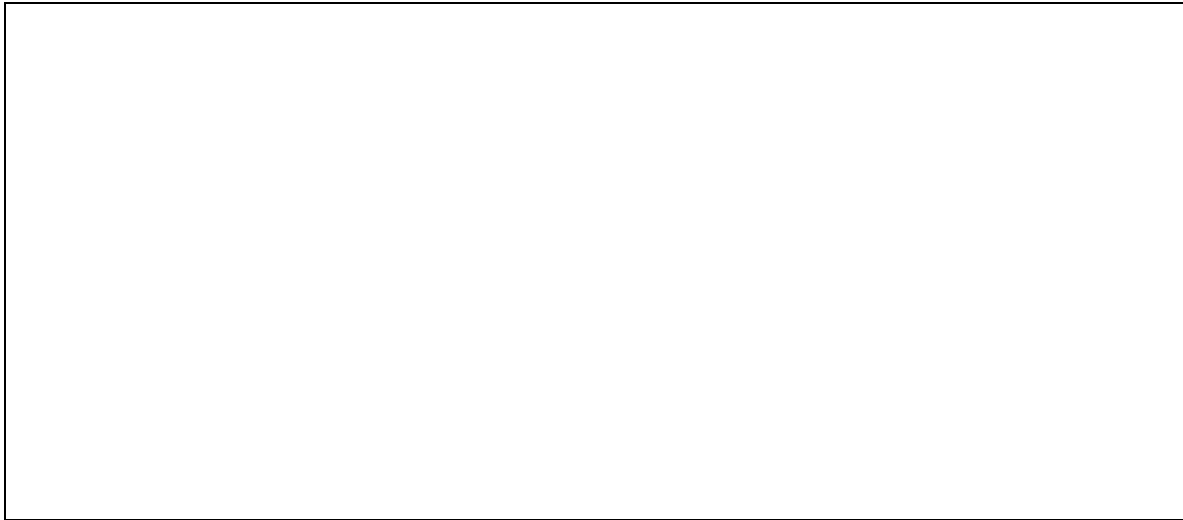


Paper Shadows by Wayson Choy
Reading Guide by Janet Somerville

Thematic Warmup

How reliable is memory?

Think of your **earliest memory**. Try to fill in sounds, smells and other sensory details to recreate that moment.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to write their response to the prompt about their earliest memory.

Explain in your own words what that Cantonese saying, “*At three, at eighty—the same*” means. What does it suggest about memory or existence?

PART ONE: pp. 3-158 (Chapters 1-12)

Chapter One (pp. 3-17)

Define *fate*:

--

Explain the “hauntings” Choy experienced as a young child.

Why do you think Choy’s parents had to have false paper names (*gai-gee meng*) when they immigrated?

What is the symbolism associated with the naming of CHOY WAY SUN?

Find out what you can about your own name.

Family name	Given name(s)

Chapter Two (pp. 18-40)

Explain what a *bak kwei* is. Why do you think it appeared in the home only when Father was away?

Do you believe in ghosts? Explain why/why not.

Using sensory detail, describe a room in an early childhood home.

What do you think about the idea of *chee* or aura?

Chapter Three (pp. 41-56)

For five-year-old Way Sun, the Cantonese opera was a great escape. What do you think appealed to him about the stories that were acted out on the stage?

What do you think motivates parents to lie to their children and children to lie to their parents?

Chapters Four-Six (pp. 57-84)

In these chapters Choy reveals a childhood fascination with cowboy culture. Why do you think he found it so appealing?

In your own life, explain what forms of entertainment have influenced your own behaviour.

List some of the appalling ways in which Chinese Labourers were poorly treated by the government. Be sure to note laws.

Show how language is empowering in these chapters.

What evidence is there that the young Way Sun is being culturally assimilated?

Chapter Seven (pp. 85-105)

Give examples that reveal how Choy uses humour effectively in this chapter.

Explain how manners were valued. Do you think good manners have the same currency today?

Young Wayson lived through the imagined abuse by his father. What did he later learn about other Chinatown children?

Write a journal entry that accounts for Wayson's feelings when Leong Sim tries to discipline him with the withered Bear Paw and his time shut in the closet at home as a result.

Chapters Eight and Nine (pp. 106-127)

What do you remember about going to kindergarten? Can you remember the room? Your teacher? The activities?

What event convinces Sonny that school might be OK? Why does he say, “I forgot that I had been dead”? (114)

What were your 1st books that were read to you?

What was your favourite picture book? Why?

What was your favourite story to be read?

How can you tell that the *herbalist* was a respected member of the Chinese community?

Chapters Ten and Eleven (pp. 128-153)

1) List several superstitions:

-
-
-
-
-

2) Do you have any good luck rituals?

3) How is the end of WWII a symbolically apt way to end this first section?

4) How is Wayson's rapport with his grandfather a special one?

Chapters 9-11

Reading for Detail Quiz /5

What name did Wayson use for his grandfather?

What did his grandfather wear for his last photograph?

What welcome gift did Wayson receive that would help him grow?

What August event led to celebrations in Chinatown?

Where was Choy King buried?

PART ONE Test

Interpreting Passages (5X2 marks= /10)

Explain what each of the following passages contributes to Wayson Choy's memoir and what they reveal about the people in his life. Answers **must be in sentence form**.

- a) *“ That afternoon, in my fifty-seventh year, a phone call from a stranger pushed me towards a mystery. The past, as I knew it, began to shift.”*

- b) *“When father was a thirteen year old student...a fortune teller had told him he had a special gift.”*

- c) *“Everything mother treasured lay on the floor, cracked or totally demolished.”*

- d) *“ ‘They cry for happy’ Mother had told me. But Mother lied.”*

- e) *“I came home in the late afternoon, feverish with amazement. I told the family about a stage-wide chorus of pretty birds, each one swaying in rhythm to the music.”*

Writing in Role

/7 Content /3 Style

Pretend you are Wayson and write a journal entry in 1st person in which you reflect on all of the following events: the burlesque show with Uncle Kew; being “Gung- Gung’s” perfect companion; kindergarten; the “Bear Paw” and Shut Closet” incidents. Be sure to communicate your feelings clearly. (About 300 words)

Chapters 15-17

Explain how getting a dog changed Wayson's life. How did he learn to become more responsible?

What experience have you had with pets? Do you have an interesting anecdote to tell?

How can you tell that Wayson is becoming more and more of a "banana?" How does he manage to balance being both Canadian and Chinese?

What are the issues surrounding attending Chinese School?

- a) for Wayson
- b) for his parents

PART TWO Test (Chapters 12-20)

Interpreting Passages (5X2 marks= 10 marks)

Explain what FIVE of the following passages contribute to Wayson Choy's memoir and what they reveal about the people in his life. Answers **must be in sentence form**.

“Gung-gung sung fohr!” I said, finally. “Grandfather shipped out!”

They didn't take notes...other than a frightened boy's words, there was no evidence.

All that summer, I felt different, but had no understanding. Everything outwardly, afterall, seemed the same.

Larry and I became fast friends. For my truant afternoons, by some miracle, I had found a perfect sidekick.

For years, I wondered about the geography of Saskatchewan.

It was a fine line. If you had too many bruises...you hid from others.

Writing Activity (10 marks)

Your mark will be based on content, style and accurate spelling/grammar.

By his own admission, when Wayson leaves for Ontario at the end of Part Two, he has become more and more “like a banana.” By referring to specific evidence from this section of the memoir, show how Wayson is struggling with honouring two cultures: Chinese and Canadian traditions.

PART THREE

Chapters 18-20

1) What did Wayson come to understand about his father's behaviour in relation to his life on the CPR ship?

2) Describe the conflict between Wayson's father and the captain.

3) Describe the encounter with Tommy Soon while Wayson and his friends played marbles.

4) What happened to Garson and how did this incident affect Wayson?

5) How did Wayson leave Vancouver? How did he feel about it?

6) In 300 words describe an important change in your life, whether a new school, a new home or a new city. How did you feel? Was it ultimately a good or bad change?

Chapters 18-20

Reading for Detail Quiz /7

How did Wayson's dad get revenge on the complaining new captain of the CPR ship where he managed the kitchen?

With what did Wayson's mother bribe him to stay home alone while she went out to play mahjong with her friends?

After the playground sex-ed lesson, why does Wayson wonder about "the geography of Saskatchewan?"

Give one reason that Wayson is jealous of his "little brother" Garson.

What traumatic event happened to Garson when he was only eight years old?

Where do Wayson and his mom take the train to join his father at the end of chapter 20, leaving Vancouver's Chinatown behind?

What kind of business is the family planning to run in their new hometown?

CHAPTERS 21-24

278)

Signs, pay attention to them!

* “Phantom of the Opera t-shirt”

281)

Half a century later, like shards of glass in a kaleidoscope, old patterns of memory shift, bringing strange shapes and shadows into view.

- adoption: boys cost up to 10x more than girls
- family history: Gung Gung: FIRST WIFE
 - SECOND WIFE
 - Yune Shee (character sketch)
- footbinding tradition (292)

1922 Nellie Hop Wah

1939 Wayson “bought”

Chapters 22-23

Reading for Detail Quiz /5

1. What proof is there that Wayson’s great-grandfather never laboured in the fields?
2. What happened to Toy Choy’s mother?
3. To what does the phrase “delicate golden lilies” refer?
4. What was the “Anglo name” that Gung-gung took for himself in Victoria?
5. Why did Yune-Shee resent her life in Canada?

BONUS: What did grandfather’s birth name, Duk-Lin, mean?

Family Dynamics
Chapters 25 and 26

“We became mutually secretive” (307)

- old saying: “ The firefly glows inside the chicken.” (311)

FIRST WIFE:

-adultery.....loyalty to family=suicide

1983

- father’s death: visited by two ghosts: 1)
- 2)

PART FOUR

1) How did Wayson’s parents manage to evade questions about his birth?

2) What indication is there about the power of signs?

3) Explain what you think “unseen gifts” are.

- 4) Why is Aunt Mary anxious about selling the family home? What does that reveal about her beliefs?

- 5) Explain what the following means: “one’s life should always be read twice, once for the experience and once for the astonishment.”

Use the following quotation as an opening line for a fictional narrative about 250 words long: “*By age five, I was a veteran, an opportunist.*”

Content (interesting detail; appeal to senses)
/7marks

Style (variety of sentence structure; interesting and appropriate diction; 1st person narration)

/5marks

Length (250 words +/- 50 words)
/3marks

TOTAL: /15marks

The facts behind the fiction

You are going to be creating a picture-book story based on the Chinese experience in Canada.

To learn about this period you will be looking at 2 websites available through *Canada's Digital Collections*, a government of Canada website which presents images and historical information from Canada's past.

Step 1 Start by reading:

Across the Generations: a history of the Chinese in Canada

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/generations/index2.html>

Step 2 Choose an artifact on which to base your story

You will also be using information from

A Chinese Canadian Story: the Yip Sang Family

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/>

This site tells the story of the Yip Sang Family.

Yip Sang was one of Vancouver's most successful merchants in the early 1900s. In addition to his family story, the site includes a collection of 300 artifacts which were Vancouver Museum.

The direct link to the artifacts is:

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/collection/index.html>

The artifacts represent a variety of items from opium bowls to luggage tags to school notebooks. Page 5 is a large collection of clothing, traditional, western and theatrical.

Step 3 – Make Notes from *Across the Generations*

You must collect point form information on:

- i. Chinese Exclusion Act & Head Tax
- ii. Bachelor Society & Building the CPR
- iii. Vancouver's Chinatown/Toronto's Chinatown/Victoria's Chinatown*

In addition you may also want to collect information from the Yip Sang Family site

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/>

on:

- i. Chinese opera
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/building/index.html> (third floor)
- ii. The life of Yip Sang, an influential Vancouver businessman
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/biograph/index.html>
- iii. The Wing Sang Building in Vancouver
<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/yipsang/building/index.html>

Step 3 – Make Notes from *Across the Generations*

You must collect point form information on:

- i. Chinese Exclusion Act & Head Tax
- ii. Bachelor Society & Building the CPR
- iii. Vancouver's Chinatown/Toronto's Chinatown/Victoria's Chinatown*

Marking Scheme: /30

Research Notes (completeness, accuracy)

1 2 3 4 5

Bibliographic Information (URL, print citations, correct format)

0 1 2

Audience appropriate (geared for up to 10 year olds)

1 2 3

Use of artifact & Background information

1 2 3 4 5

Authenticity of story

1 2 3 4 5

Artwork (cover, title page, dedication)

1 2 3 4 5

Adherence to spelling & grammar conventions

0 1 2

On task behaviour in class

1 2 3

FINAL TEST: Parts 3 and 4

PART A

Fill-in-the-blank and Short Answer

/10

Each correct answer is worth ½ mark.

- a) Wayson says he became “a kind of _____” three weeks before his 57th birthday.
- b) The woman who called in and left a message for Wayson during his Vancouver radio interview was _____. She told him when they spoke that she had seen his _____ on the bus. Later she revealed that his real father had been a member of the Cantonese _____.
- c) In 1939, Wayson was _____ to Toy and Lilly Choy,
- d) Name one of Wayson’s aunts who confirmed he was adopted: _____.
- e) Name Gung Gung’s Second Wife: _____.
- f) In the Old Chinese tradition of binding young girls’ feet, the ideal foot length was _____ inches. Such feet were known as “delicate golden _____.”
- g) Yune Shee used to scream threats at her daughters by saying, “In China I would _____ you girls cheap!”
- h) List THREE “signs” of ghosts that touched Wayson’s life:
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____
- i) Wayson discovers that Gung Gung’s First Wife committed _____ while Gung Gung was in Gold Mountain. As a result, she _____ First Son. The Old China punishment for her crime was known as the “agony of a thousand _____.”

Explain what each of the following sayings means and what they reveal about particular people in this memoir. (1 mark each)

- a) “A chicken has eaten a firefly.”

- b) “Half a century later, like shards of glass in a kaleidoscope, old patterns of memory shifted, bringing strange shapes and shadows into view.”

Group Radio Dramatization

In groups of 3 or 4 you will adapt a section of *Paper Shadows* and produce a Radio Dramatization. Your dramatization will include music and sound effects and any other production features that might enhance your pieces.

You will also have to create rough script that will be submitted with your radio dramatization.

A **director** must be chosen who will coordinate group activities. The director must make sure that all group members are productive and occupied throughout the entire process.

Length: 6-8 minutes.

Procedure:

1. Choose a section from the book
2. Brainstorm and create rough scripts (include music and sound effects)
3. Choose a platform (Garageband, etc.)
4. Record and edit piece.
5. Each group member writes 1 -2 paragraphs describing what you did for your group.



Radio Dramatization

In groups of 3 or 4 you will adapt a section of *Paper Shadows* and produce a Radio Dramatization.

Your piece should be between 6-8 minutes long.

Evaluation Rubric

In-class on task behaviour

0 1 2 3 4 5

Script (clearly adapted from the memoir; authentic characterization)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Performance (voices clear; pacing appropriate; tone varied; sound effects complimentary)

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Creativity (use of music and sound effects)

0 1 2 3 4 5

TOTAL: 30 marks

MEMOIR WRITING

The writer of a memoir takes us back to a corner of his or her life that was unusually vivid or intense—childhood for instance—or that was framed by unique events...a memoir is a window into a life.

~ William Zisner

Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of a Memoir

It is our inward journey that leads us through time—forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiralling.

~ Eudora Welty

You will be using an object of importance to you to create a short personal essay (about 2 pages, typed and double-spaced) . The object could be something such as a platter used at family dinners, a home, a photograph, a clock, a number, etc. Make sure it matters to you and enables you to tell a true story about it that includes sensory detail and direct speech.

Use the space below to brainstorm about your chosen object. Provide descriptive detail as well as reasons for its significance in your life.

MEMOIR WRITING

/30 marks

Writing About an Object of Importance

Length: About 500 words

Evaluation Rubric

KNOWLEDGE

Evidence of Process (drafting, editing, proofreading)

Limited evidence 5	Some evidence 6+	Considerable evidence (at least 3 drafts) 7-8	Thorough evidence (at least 4 drafts) 9-10
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APPLICATION (sensory detail evident, interesting to read)

Voice unconvincing or inconsistent, limited diction 5	Voice sometimes convincing, limited diction 6+	Voice convincing, appropriate and varied diction 7-8	Voice absolutely convincing and appropriate diction true to character 9-10
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COMMUNICATION

Organization (clearly and logically organized)

Limited organization 2	Some organization 3+	Considerable organization 3.5-4	Impeccable organization 4.5-5
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COMMUNICATION

Spelling/Grammar (adheres to conventions, accurate)

More than 10 errors 2-	Six to ten errors 3+	One to five errors 3.5-4.5	No errors 5
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Reviews

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"In Between Souls"

Wayson Choy. *Paper Shadows: A Chinatown Childhood*. Viking
n.p.

Reviewed by Eva-Marie Kröller

Trying to decipher the print and pictures in his kindergarten books, Choy Way Sun decides that the copyright notices are magic formulae akin to the auspicious words on Chinese New Year banners, and that rubbing them will make his "deepest wishes come true." If one of these wishes was to write nothing but exceptional books one day, then it has become abundantly true, for Choy's memoir of his childhood in Vancouver's Chinatown is every bit as accomplished as *The Jade Peony*. In fact, the two are companion texts, and the memoir makes clear just how deeply rooted in Choy's personal experience the novel is. However, the interest of *Paper Shadows* by no means exhausts itself in the autobiographical clues it provides to *The Jade Peony*, nor does this memoir initiate the tactics of other best-selling authors who simply wish to initiate their earlier success by covering similar ground. On the contrary, *Paper Shadows* is a magnificent book in its own right, and its distinctive voice represents a significant contribution to Asian-Canadian writing.

The question of voice is central to both books. While *The Jade Peony* interweaves the narratives of three fictional children, *Paper Shadows* focuses on one, Wayson Choy himself, who reminisces about his Chinatown childhood following the accidental discovery that his life has more versions than he had previously realized. Shortly after the launch of *The Jade Peony*, a woman previously unknown to him informed the 57-year-old Choy that he was adopted. He finds to his surprise that "the truth of my adoption was in fact known by . . . many relatives, yet no one broke the news to me," and he initiates a search for both his adopted and biological parents' past and his own place in it. The identity of his biological parents remains shadowy and his affection for his adopted parents undisturbed, but, as everyone around him insists, the dead are as present as the living in a world where creaking doors and unaccountably wilting trees announce the ancestors' rustling presence.

The discovery of his adoption may have been a startling outcome of the publication of his first novel, but Choy's life-story makes that recent episode sound like a logical sequel to his existence as an "in-between soul." It is surely no coincidence that he has particular difficulty, as a young student, to remember the calligraphy for the word "I," "a killer ideogram, drawn with seven breathtaking strokes. One *upward-dash*; two long, opposite-facing curves-with-hooks; and three *criss-crosses* - or was that two *dashes* and three *criss-crosses*?" As a child, he is forever torn in several directions at once. Thus his fascination with Cantonese opera and its costumes is paralleled by an infatuation with cowboy movies, he loves opera dolls as much as he does Disney's Dopey, and he is as conversant in Chinese legends as he is in Anderson's fairy-tales. One virtuoso scene shows Way Sun reading in "Chinglish"

from his picture-book to his mother who conceals her laughter at his "*Gee-Piggy gong-wah, oink! oink!*" in "sudden fit[s] of strange coughing."

However, while for some time Way Sun seems to sample the best of two worlds, English soon wins the day. He believes English to be "more interesting," begins to find Cantonese opera "ridiculous," and embarrasses his family by failing Chinese school but thriving under the tutelage of his English teachers (in another instance of the importance of "voice," one of them, a mild-mannered lady whose voice he has never known to rise above a whisper, sends a group of bullies scuttling with a bellowed "YOU BOYS GO HOME!"). Way Sun's parents themselves, although they urge their son to honour his roots, are "in-between souls." Most of the time, their child goes by the name Sonny, after Al Jolson's "Sonny Boy."

Although Choy critically describes his young self as a "banana . . . yellow on the outside and white on the inside," the book displays a remarkably warm-hearted humour in describing Way Sun's plight. The pages describing his visits to the opera with his mother and her lady-friends are among the finest and coincidentally an homage to Choy's biological father, an opera actor. "I loved the life that blossomed all over the auditorium, as if it were a busy village square," Choy reminisces, but he also determinedly tackles the "restricted" perspective of a bored three-year-old who entertains himself through a long aria by quietly singing "Old Macdonald Had a Farm" in his mother's lap, concluding that the "lovesick Princess [looked] very sorry that she had wailed so long . . . Everyone clapped to see [her] leave." Occasionally, the disturbing nature of an incident requires that the child's limited understanding is complemented more emphatically with the adult

narrator's perspective. His cousin Garton's near-murder at the hands of a pedophile acquires a mature context this way, as does Wayson's father's determination to stay with his family despite a cooling relationship with his wife. In other words, the humour in *Paper Shadows* tempers but does not erase the author's acute observation of the racism, brutality, and personal anguish that existed all around the boy. This book does not depict a sugar-coated idyll.

Way Sun is an endearing child who looks invariably angelic (and not all that different from the grown-up Choy) in the numerous family photographs provided. Together with the skillful handling of a layered perspective, however, Sonny's temperament prevents this narrative from producing an unduly idealized vision of childhood. He is "tiger-spirited," a disposition he has inherited (or so he thinks) from his father who, in one memorable scene, demolishes the sitting-room while his wife and child barricade themselves upstairs. Indulged and expressive, Way Sun is not yet muffled by the elaborate social etiquette of Chinese culture the exchanges of which have too often been deployed, by Caucasian and emigrant Chinese writers alike, as markers of exoticism. Way Sun and his parents' outbursts are refreshing, but still remain culturally specific: "Like a Chinese orchestra, their wailing and my sobbing see-sawed back and forth," the whole accompanied by flamboyant physical action.

Paper Shadows may have only one narrator, but it offers in fact a whole chorus of voices, giving equal time to the dead and the living. If a jade peony was an apt metaphor for the conflicts depicted in Choy's novel, then the leitmotif in this memoir is the "endless knot," the image of which prefaces each one of the four

sections: "All lives are ten times ten thousand secrets . . . Whose life, I wonder, is not an endless knot."