

## Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic

By: Ginnie Lo

*Activity Level: Intermediate*

### PURPOSE

Students will interact with the story through discussion questions and writing activities such as writing a thank you letter from Auntie Yang to the farmer, writing a food review of boiled soybeans, and writing interview questions for the author and illustrator.

### NEBRASKA STATE EDUCATION CONTENT STANDARDS CONNECTION

#### LA 3.1.6.a | LA 4.1.6.a

Identify author's purpose(s) (e.g., explain, entertain, inform, persuade) to support text comprehension and describe how author's perspective (e.g., beliefs, assumptions, biases) influences text.

#### LA 3.1.6.b | LA 4.1.6.b

Identify and describe elements of literary text (e.g., characters, setting, plot, point of view).

#### LA 3.1.6.h | LA 4.1.6.h

Compare and contrast similar themes, topics, and/or patterns of events in literary and informational texts to develop a multicultural perspective.

#### LA 3.2.2.d, LA 4.2.2.d

Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.

### WHAT'S THE CONNECTION TO AGRICULTURE?

Soybeans were originally cultivated in northeastern China 5,000 years ago and are a staple ingredient in many Asian cuisines. In the United States, major uses of soybeans include animal feed, soybean oil food products, bio-fuel, and an alternative to petroleum oil in the manufacture of plastics, crayons, ink, car foam insides, and more. The Great Soybean Picnic features edamame, the immature soybean, where the pods are boiled or steamed and served with salt. The book focuses on cultural connections while highlighting family traditions and community, which are built around the food we eat, provided by those involved in agricultural production around us.

### MATERIALS

- A copy of the book *Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic* by Ginnie Lo
- Anchor chart – descriptive writing



## VOCABULARY

**Edamame** – Japanese word for immature green soybeans usually in the pod, meaning ‘branch beans’

**Mao dou** – Chinese word for soybeans, meaning ‘hairy bean’

**Soybeans** – agricultural plant of the pea family which produce edible seeds

**Porcelain** – a white ceramic, china

**Dumpling** – a small savory ball of dough that’s boiled or fried

**Peered** – look keenly at someone or something

**Fortunate** – favored, lucky

**Eagerly** – emphasize a strong desire to do or have something

*Academic:*

NOTE: A glossary guide at the back of the book provides an explanation of English and Chinese words that may be unfamiliar, including pronunciation for Chinese words that approximate how they are said in Mandarin.

## BACKGROUND AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

Soybeans are second only to corn as the most-produced grain in Nebraska, with over 5 million acres of land dedicated to growing them. That’s close to 4 million football fields of soybeans in Nebraska. Half of the soybeans produced in Nebraska are shipped to the top importers of soybeans, China and Mexico.

The two simplest ways of using whole soybeans for food are in their fresh green state and in their whole dry state. In either state, the soybeans must be cooked before they are eaten. Fresh green soybeans may be eaten after about 15 minutes of cooking, whereas whole dry soybeans take 4-6 hours to cook.

Soybeans grown in Nebraska are generally a small-seeded field type versus the large-seeded vegetable type which are preferable for eating like in the story. The biggest use for Nebraska soybeans is cooking oil, but many other foods contain soybean oil like margarine, mayonnaise, crackers, breads, and cookies. Tuna in cans is packed with soybean oil. Soybean oil is used as an environmentally safer alternative to petroleum oil in the production of plastics, crayons, ink, carpet backing, and car seat foam. After extracting oil from the soybean, the bulk of the grain is leftover as soybean meal and is used for animal feed. Soybeans are also used to make soy milk and soy flour.

Soybeans can be rotated with other crops in Nebraska. After growing soybeans on a field for a season, farmers rotate to another crop and benefit from higher yields. This is because after growing soybeans, the soil is rich in nitrogen, which is an important nutrient needed for corn growth.

## INTEREST APPROACH

• Begin by posing questions for student discussion on topics in the book:

- What do you know about soybeans? Have you ever seen or eaten soybeans? Do you know any other names for soybeans? What other foods do you think might be similar to soybeans? What other foods do you think might be made from soybeans?

*Answers will vary.*

- *small green plants*
  - *see fields of them in Nebraska*
  - *edamame are soybeans boiled or steamed in pods (may be eaten in a Chinese restaurant)*
  - *soybeans are in the pea family, plant looks similar to peas and has pods similar to peas, tofu is made from soybeans*
- Share a time you made a meal or dish with your family. What did you choose to make and why? How is this food special to you and your family?  
*Answers will vary.*
- What do you know about China? Where is it located? What is the geography like? What are some Chinese foods or dishes?  
*China is a country in Asia, it is quite large and has a population of 1.4 billion. Great diversity in geography—coasts has fertile lowlands and foothills and is location of most agricultural output and human population. Southern areas consist of hilly and mountainous terrain. Lo mein, edamame, dumplings, spring rolls*
- What do you know about farming? Have you ever been to a farm? What are some different types of farms?  
*Answers will vary. Farms can have animals and/or crops. Some are commercial crops grown in higher quantities, some are vegetable crops, even sod (grass) is grown in farms!*
- Encourage the students to understand the background of the story and anticipate some themes by taking a ‘picture walk’ through the book:
- Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
  - Draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, illustrations, author’s and illustrator’s note, photographs, glossary, and dedications.
  - Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

## PROCEDURE

Read *Auntie Yang’s Great Soybean Picnic* aloud.

### 1. Discussion

- a. Choose some or all literal comprehension questions from the list below for discussion:
- From what point of view, or perspective, is this story told?
  - Where does Jinyi live? Where do Auntie Yang and Uncle Yang live? How far away is Jinyi’s house from Auntie Yang’s house?
  - Why did Auntie and Uncle Yang and Mama and Baba immigrate to the United States? Why did they decide to stay and not return to China?
  - What does Mama miss about her home in China?
  - What does Mama mean when she says she wants the cousins to grow up “as close as four soybeans in a soybean pod”?

- What do Jinyi and her three cousins do together and learn on their visits to Auntie Yang’s house?
- Whose turn is it to help Auntie Yang and Mama fix dinner? What shape do the pork-and-spinach dumplings resemble? What does Auntie Yang think of Jinyi’s cooking?
- Who wins the dumpling-eating contest? How many dumplings do Pei and Ginger eat? Ping? Jinyi? How many more dumplings does Jinyi eat than Pei and Ginger?
- What does Auntie Yang see on their Sunday drive? What does she call it?
- Why are Auntie Yang and her family so happy to find soybeans in the United States? For what were soybeans in Illinois grown and used? What were they grown and used for in China?
- When Auntie Yang asks the farmer if they can pick some of his soybeans, how does he react? What does the farmer say?
- From the author’s and illustrator’s descriptions, what do the soybeans look like? Describe their color, texture, size, and shape.
- List the steps that Auntie Yang and her family followed for cooking soybeans. According to Mama and Auntie Yang, what is “the best way to eat soybeans”?
- What does it mean if you get a four-bean pod? A five-bean pod?
- What are some of the different ways people prepare and eat soybeans? How do Auntie Yang and her family like them best?
- What does it mean when Jinyi says that their “empty soybean pods piled almost as high as the famous Yellow Mountain”?
- Who does Auntie Yang invite to the second soybean picnic? Who is invited to the third soybean picnic? How does Auntie Yang make sure she has enough soybeans to feed all of the families?
- At the third soybean picnic, what other Chinese dishes and foods are served? What do Jinyi and Pei squeal at?
- Auntie Yang’s annual soybean picnic involves a lot of collaboration. Describe two or three examples of collaboration in this story.
- Eventually the soybean picnic grows too large to be held in Auntie Yang’s backyard. Where does the annual soybean picnic move to and about how many Chinese families attend each year?
- Why aren’t Jinyi, Pei, Ginger, and Ping able to attend the annual soybean picnic some years?
- What is Auntie Yang’s and Mama’s dream? How does Auntie Yang’s and Mama’s dream come true? Who visits them?
- What do the visiting relatives from China think of the American soybeans? How do they react while eating them?
- Why does Auntie Yang say she is “luckier than the emperor of China”?
- What soybean picnic does Jinyi refer to as “the greatest soybean picnic ever”?

## 2. Descriptive Writing

- a. Refer students to the Descriptive Writing Anchor Chart (included with this guide). Choose a descriptive writing activity below:
- Have students write a thank you letter from Auntie Yang to the farmer for letting her pick and buy his soybeans. Encourage students to think about the following questions when writing their thank you letters:
    - How was finding the farmer's farm and his soybeans significant to Auntie Yang and her family?
    - How did the farmer play a role in Auntie Yang's soybean picnic?
    - How was the farmer's generosity important to the start of the annual soybean picnic?
  - If possible, cook boiled soybeans for students to taste ([www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/edamamecooked-fresh-soybeans-recipe.html](http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/edamamecooked-fresh-soybeans-recipe.html)). Ask students to imagine that they are a food reviewer visiting the annual soybean picnic and have students write a review of Auntie Yang's soybean dish.
    - What do you like/dislike about the dish and why?
    - Encourage students to use descriptive language to describe the taste, texture, smell, temperature, appearance, and portion sizes.
    - Provide students with examples of food reviews for research and reference.
  - Have students read the interview with author Ginnie Lo and illustrator Beth Lo. Ask students to imagine that they are going to interview Ginnie Lo and Beth Lo and have students write a list of interview questions that they would like to ask them.
    - What thoughts and questions about the story, characters, or themes in *Auntie Yang's Great Soybean Picnic* do you have?
    - What was their inspiration for the story?
    - What do you want to know about their writing or illustrating process?

## FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

Choose some or all follow-up questions from the list below for discussion or use as writing prompts for journaling and sharing:

- Jinyi and her cousins participate in Chinese lessons, watercolor and folding paper activities, and help prepare many different Chinese dishes at Auntie Yang's house.
  - What are some cultural traditions that you and your family participate in?
  - How are these traditions important to you and your family?
  - How do they bring people together?
- Jinyi and her cousins are given the responsibility of helping prepare and cook Chinese dishes.
  - Describe a time you wanted more responsibility or you were given more responsibility.
  - How did you feel in that situation?
  - What did you learn?

- How did your parents or guardians show you they were proud of you?
- Soybeans have a special cultural significance to Auntie Yang and her family.
  - What foods bring your family together?
  - Who makes them?
  - When do you eat them?
  - What is the “best way” to eat them?
- Describe a time you prepared and made a dish.
  - Why did you pick that particular food?
  - Who helped you prepare the dish?
  - What challenges did you face?
  - With whom did you share the final result?
  - What advice would you give others learning to cook?
- Family members sometimes move away or do not live nearby.
  - Do you have family that live in different cities, states, or countries?
  - How do you stay in touch with them?
  - How often do you get to visit them?
- Auntie Yang lives in a rural area outside Chicago, Illinois.
  - How does your neighborhood compare to Auntie Yang’s?
  - How might where you live impact the types of foods and community resources available to you?
- Auntie Yang and Mama were very homesick when they first immigrated to the United States. Think about how you felt when you moved to a new town or changed schools and/or when you met someone who just moved or was new to your school.
  - How did you or the other person feel?
  - Did you or the other person feel welcomed in your new town or school?
  - What was exciting about it? What was difficult?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Science/STEM:

- Have students explore the Illinois Soybean Association SoyCam archived photos and field notes to learn about soybean farming and production from Illinois farmers ([www.podtoplate.org/pod-to-plate/soycam/](http://www.podtoplate.org/pod-to-plate/soycam/)). How do farmers prepare their fields for soybeans? What are some factors that impact soybean growth? Then have students grow their own soybeans in plastic bags using the Nebraska Agriculture In the Classroom Soy Banie Baby activity (<https://nefbfoundation.org/images/FOUndation/resources/activity-guides/Soy-Beanie-Baby.pdf>).

- Ask students to watch the soybean video Busy Beans to learn how soybeans are used as a renewable source for food, fuels, and other biobased products ([www.soybiobased.org/busybeans](http://www.soybiobased.org/busybeans)). Then have students research renewable soybean biobased products and their impact on the environment. What are the various benefits (environmental, economic, health) of using biobased soybean products?
- Check out Into the Outdoor's Soy Savvy video series ([www.intotheoutdoors.org/topics/soybeanscience/](http://www.intotheoutdoors.org/topics/soybeanscience/)) to learn about the science and history of soybeans with the accompanying classroom discussion guide.
- Have students play Illinois Soybean Association's interactive Pod to Plate online game to learn about soybean production, transportation, processing, products, and exports (<http://podtoplate.org/pod-to-plate/games/podto-plate/>). Explore the Pod to Plate teacher's guide for other ideas and resources.

### *Social Studies/Geography:*

- Ask students to compare and contrast the United States and China using a Venn Diagram. Have students think about how these countries are both different and similar based on location, geography, size, climate, population, demographics, language, government, and economy.
- Provide students with a world map and ask them to locate and mark China and Chicago, Illinois. Ask students to research and calculate the overall distance between Chicago and China, and estimate how long a one-way flight would be from China to Chicago, or vice versa.
- Have students research how World War II impacted the immigration of Chinese people to the United States. How did the United States and China's relationship change during World War II? What law was repealed in 1943 and how did this affect Chinese immigration?
- In small groups, assign students to research George Washington Carver or William Morse and how he influenced the production of soybeans in the United States. Who was he? How was his role significant in shaping the American history of soybeans? Then ask students to share and present their findings.
- Investigate the impact of World War II and the revolution in China on soybean production in the United States. How were the 1940s a major turning point in the American production of soybeans? Why was there an increased demand for soybeans at this time? How were farmers motivated to grow more soybeans?
- Have students research and identify the many uses of soybeans in the United States using a web diagram or graphic organizer. Using information collected in their graphic organizer, ask students to identify pros and cons of soybean products, utilization, and their impact on the environment.
- Ask students to break down myths and stereotypes about immigration with the "Immigration Myths" lesson plan from Teaching Tolerance ([www.tolerance.org/lesson/immigration-myths](http://www.tolerance.org/lesson/immigration-myths)).
- Have students explore what it is like to be an outsider in another country with the "You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand" lesson plan from PBS ([http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/foreducators\\_lesson\\_plan\\_01.html](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/foreducators_lesson_plan_01.html)).

## Descriptive Writing:

- Zooms in on your topic.
- Describes a person, place, event, or object in great detail.
- Uses rich, descriptive language:
  - › Adjectives: gigantic, shimmering.
  - › Similes & metaphors: as bright as the sun.
  - › Personification: the clouds were angry, the wind whistled.
  - › Visualization: the pumpkins were orange and splattered.
  - › The five senses: I tasted the salty ocean air and felt the soft sand between my toes.
- Shows, doesn't tell: My heart felt like it would pour out of my chest.
- Picks a small moment or specific thing.

