

*The Tale of Qu Yuan*

Adapted for the stage by Bethany Bondurant

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Characters:

Narrator	Citizens
Qu Yuan	Fisherman
Corrupt People	River Dragon
King	

*All of the players begin with their backs towards the audience. At the sound of a gong, the narrator crosses downstage and begins.*

**Narrator:** Dragon Boat Festival is a holiday celebrated in China, and by Chinese communities around the globe, on the fifth day of the fifth moon. This day marks the beginning of summer and has been celebrated since ancient times. During the festival, long, slender, colorfully decorated dragon boats are raced. For many people, Dragon Boat Festival is a time to remember one of China's most famous poet-patriots, Qu Yuan. This is his story. *Sound of a gong as players take place.* More than twenty-three hundred moons ago, lived a man named Qu Yuan, in the country of China. He was a fair and honest man who loved his country, but he was surrounded by corrupt people who did not like his reasonable guidelines. *Corrupt People surround Qu Yuan and begin to whisper and plot with one another.* So they plotted, and told lies about Qu Yuan. *Corrupt people audibly whisper lies to the king.* And he was sent into exile by the king.

**King:** Qu Yuan, you are here by banished. Pack your things and leave!

**Narrator:** But Qu Yuan loved his country still, and he wrote beautiful poetry that told of his love. He shared his poems, and the people of China loved the poetry of Qu Yuan.

**Qu Yuan:**

From the east rides up the sun,  
 Into the West its course is done,  
 From Pale dawn til all is black  
 Who can measure out its track?  
 Say what virtue has the moon,  
 That it wanes and waxes soon.

**Citizen 1:** Oh how we love your poems!

**Citizen 2:** You're my favorite poet!

**Citizen 3:** Can I have your autograph?

**Narrator:** But one day, he heard that his beloved country was in turmoil. It had been invaded by the enemy! Qu Yuan was so sad, that he grabbed a huge rock and threw himself into the Milo River and drowned. Not too long after the death of the poet Qu Yuan, a fisherman went out on the Milo River to fish. But before he threw in his nets, he tossed in some rice to ensure that he would catch fish. *Sound of chimes. Unnoticed by the fisherman, River Dragon swims past, eats the rice, and makes some River Dragon sound effects.* And as he was throwing his nets in the water, he heard a booming voice.

**Voice (Qu Yuan):** I AM HUNGRY!

**Narrator:** The fisherman looked left, he looked right, but he saw no one. Thinking that it was only his imagination, he continued to fish. He waited, but caught nothing. So he gave up and went home. *Sun/Moon transition of time with chimes.* The next day, when the fisherman came back, he decided that he would throw in a bit more rice than he had the day before to ensure that today he would catch fish. *Sound of chimes. Once again, River Dragon eats the rice and makes dragon noises.* But as he was throwing in his nets, he heard a booming voice.

**Voice (Qu Yuan):** I AM STILL HUNGRY! GIVE ME MORE TO EAT!

**Narrator:** The fisherman looked everywhere, but again saw no one. At the end of the day, when he had caught no fish, he said:

**Fisherman:** Tomorrow I will take no chances!

*Sun/Moon transition of time with chimes.*

**Narrator:** So when the fisherman came back the next day, he brought an entire bag of rice. And before he threw in his nets, he dumped the entire bag in the water! *Sound of chimes. River Dragon eats all of the rice, rubs his tummy, and swims away satisfied.*

**Fisherman:** There, that should do it!

**Narrator:** And just as he was about to throw in his nets, a beautiful cloud appeared over his boat; a vision of an old man became visible in the mist.

**Fisherman:** Who are you?

**Qu Yuan:** I am the spirit of the poet Qu Yuan, and I am very, very hungry.

**Fisherman:** But how can you still be hungry when I have just thrown an entire bag of rice into the river?

**Qu Yuan:** Well, the River Dragon is much faster than I, and he swallows all of the rice before I can even take one bite!

**Fisherman:** What can I do to help you?

**Qu Yuan:** Tomorrow when you come to fish, bring handfuls of rice wrapped in bamboo leaves secured with black, red, green, and white ropes. The River Dragon will be scared of the colors and unable to untie the ropes. But, make sure that you throw in loose rice so that we may both be satisfied.

*Sun/Moon transition of time with chimes.*

**Narrator:** So the next day, the fisherman did as Qu Yuan asked: he threw in handfuls of loose rice first, then he threw in the rice packages, last, he threw in his nets. When he pulled them out of the water, they were overflowing with fish! The fisherman shared his story with the citizens and even the king! And so, on the anniversary of Qu Yuan's death, which is also known as Dragon Boat Festival, the people of China make rice packages called zongzi and race great dragon boats in honor of their poet-patriot.

And that was...THE END.

#### **Resources:**

We linked with Shandong University of Beijing in the fall of 2011 to gather this delightful story.

Helpful books we used from the Teaching Resource Center at Joyner Library:

Williams, Brian. **Ancient China**. New York: Penguin Books, 1996.

ISBN 0-670-87157-5

This is a "See Through History Book" with color and interesting overlays throughout the book. Each chapter has colorful illustrations and information that appeals to children. We used the book to look at such chapters as "A nobleman's House" and "Canals and Junks." The book is so appealing that we wound up looking at all chapters.

Platt, Richard. **Beijing**. New York: Kingfisher, 2008.

ISBN 978-0-7534-6175-4

Another beautifully illustrated book which includes interesting information such as “The Forbidden City,” “Working the Land” “Building Zhongdu,” “Fall of the Ming,” just to name a few.

ISBN 978-0-7534-6175-4

Simonds, Nina. **Moonbeams, Dumplings, and Dragon Boats: a Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities, & Recipes.** San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. 2002.

ISBN 0152019839

A wonderful resource for stories, activities and even recipes! “The Tale of Qu Yuan” is included in this book.