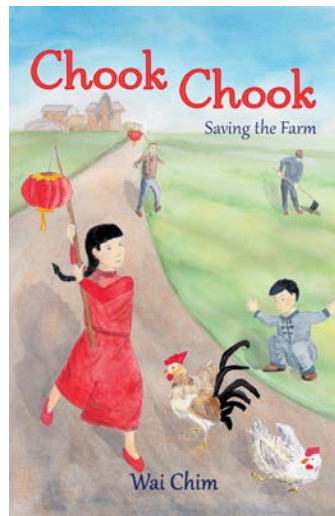


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# CHOOK CHOOK: SAVING THE FARM

Wai Chim



## Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian  
in context with the Australian curriculum  
(English)

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**SYNOPSIS**

It's Chinese New Year, but instead of bringing luck, it brings despair. The government wants to build a freeway right through Daoling Village. Mei and her family are fearful of losing the only home they have ever known.

How can Mei and her beloved chickens, Little and Lo, save their farm? *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm* shows the true meaning of community spirit when the voices of a few are heard by many.

**THEMES**

Chinese Culture:

- Aspects of Chinese culture are embedded in the text, including traditional village life and Chinese New Year.

Courage:

- Mei and her family stand up to Deputy Director Yu, who is trying to force the villagers to sell their homes.

Rural vs Urban/ Tradition vs Progress:

- The balance between supporting progress and preserving tradition features in the text.
- Traditional farming methods and craftsmanship are valued in *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm*.
- City life can conflict with village heritage.

Pets:

- Little and Lo help Mei save the village.

Family and Community:

- Mei's family and community come together to save the village.

The Role of Government:

- The style of government in China means that its citizens can't own their property.
- Governments sometimes make decisions that are unpopular.

**WRITING STYLE**

*Chook Chook: Saving the Farm* is written in first person, past tense. Mei's narration is honest and believable. Wai Chim uses an effective range of figurative language and description to draw the reader into the text. It is suitable for younger readers, aged 7+.

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**STUDY NOTES**

- *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm* begins with Mei and her family getting ready to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Research how this festival is celebrated. Create a brochure or multimodal information report to explain the rituals and traditions that are included in these celebrations. There is additional information about Chinese New Year at the end of the text (pp133-135).
- List Little's characteristics that match Mei's description of her as the 'queen of the pack' (p2). Likewise, what characteristics does Lo have that make Mei see him as 'bossy and hot-tempered' (p2)?
- How would you describe the personality of your pet? Share with a friend.
- Discuss the way in which Wai Chim introduces the problem very early in the narrative. Why is it important that complications are placed early in the structure of stories?
- Discuss the use of figurative language throughout the text. Examples include:
  - Little bones stuck out between his teeth like fangs (p10)
  - Raking the dirt with his talons like a caged bull (p12)
  - I always felt protective of them, like a mother hen (p39)
  - Villagers stared at the floor with guilty looks on their faces like when the boys at school were caught making fun of the teacher (p51)
  - His eyebrows pulled together in bitter fury (p56)
  - His large form casting an angry chook-shadow in the room (p57)
  - To feel the soft petals brushing up against her cheeks, like being in the middle of a fragrant cloud (p75)
  - It tasted like warm cinnamon nectar (p80)
  - Jin's pockmarked face was puffy and wrinkled like a dried persimmon (p83)
  - We scrambled around the house getting ready, like a basket of eager pups (p88)
  - Her skin was as pale as a swan's feathers and her lips were slick and shiny like glass (pp89-90)
  - We followed her out the door like a flock of baby chickens (p90)
  - A loud chug-chug and toot-toot of the whistle (p91)
  - Trying to imagine a huge concrete freeway tearing through the earth (p109)
  - Deputy Director Yu grinned like a contented cat (p110)
  - Ruffling up his tail feathers like a peacock (p125)
  - It felt like a million New Year's celebrations all rolled into one (p129)
- Why is Mei so cross at Jin when Director Deputy Yu comes to buy their farm?

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- Mei often comments that, ‘adults never listen’. Why does she feel like this? Give examples from the text to support your ideas. Have you ever felt like this? Write a reflection to share your experiences.
- Why does Mei later describe Jin as a ‘real hero’ (p49)? What makes a hero? Discuss.
- Why isn’t Guo very excited about Jin’s attempts to save the farm? Why is he feeling reserved and embarrassed by village life?
- Mei and Guo retell the story about how their Pa and Ma met and fell in love. How does this story help Guo to feel better (p76)?
- Wai Chim conveys Mei’s reactions to situations by using descriptive language. Discuss the following examples:
  - It felt like I’d been punched in the gut (p27)
  - I could taste a sharp bitterness at the back of my throat (p70)
  - I felt a tingling at the base of my neck and my whole body tensed (p80)
  - My palms were sweaty and the sick feeling in my stomach wouldn’t go away (p91)
  - It cracked my heart into pieces (p91)
  - My stomach twisted tight (p104)
  - The lump in my throat tightened (p108)
  - My heart was beating so hard that I thought the lions had started dancing again (p108)

Experiment with similar language features to describe feelings and emotions of your own. Brainstorm situations that would lend themselves to being described in detail.

- What does Mei mean when she says, ‘the words I had been practising fell out of my head’ (p113)?
- Why does Daoling Village become classified as a ‘protected village’?
- Imagine you are a villager from Daoling Village. Write a letter to the commissioner to explain why your village should be saved.
- Compare the story of *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm* with the picture book *Rebel!* by Allan Baillie. Use a graphic organiser to help make this comparison.
- Why doesn’t the government need permission from the farmers to take over their properties? With older students, discuss the Chinese government and how it differs from Australia’s.
- What role does Old Dan and the music box play in the text? Discuss.
- How important is hope in *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm*? What examples of hope can you find in the text?
- What do you learn about the role of ‘community’ in *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm*?
- Respond to the following statement in relation to *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm*: ‘It takes a village to save a farm.’

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- Access Scootle to view The Learning Federation resources on Chinese New Year. Other useful websites are listed below:
  - Asia Education Foundation: [www.asiaeducation.edu.au/curriculum\\_resources/arts\\_cr/f\\_2\\_chinese\\_new\\_year/f-2\\_chinese\\_new\\_year\\_landing.html](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/curriculum_resources/arts_cr/f_2_chinese_new_year/f-2_chinese_new_year_landing.html)
  - YouTube – Lion Dance: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJusyaRAq1I&list=PLCKpEHs3b8ibtycprn-itlV8XpBV-orK4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJusyaRAq1I&list=PLCKpEHs3b8ibtycprn-itlV8XpBV-orK4)
  - Our Asian Stories: [www.ourasianstories.edu.au](http://www.ourasianstories.edu.au)
- Who are your favourite characters in *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm*? Why?
- Create a menu that highlights the foods that are eaten by Mei and her family at their New Year's celebrations.
- Find out more about the Qing dynasty. Why were gifts given to the emperor? Why are the traditional methods of craftsmanship used by Old Dan so valued by the officials? Use Google images to find a music box similar to the one that Old Dan makes.
- Is tradition more important than progress? Discuss and hold a class debate.

**AUTHOR MOTIVATION**

This work was inspired by newspaper headlines and developments that are facing Chinese residents today. The country is developing rapidly and many traditions and rural villages like Mei's have come under threat. *Chook Chook: Saving the Farm* raises some of these issues and encourages young audiences to discuss and consider these developments. The text also includes many references to Chinese culture, including Chinese New Year.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Wai grew up in New York City but has spent the past several years living in sunny Sydney. When she was five years old, she started her first book about a 'daddy chicken' – it came to three pages, most of it pictures. It only took her more than twenty years to come up with the rest!

When she doesn't have chickens on the brain, Wai writes content for digital marketing channels.

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