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Picture Books

Ping-Li's Kite
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Front Street
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Young Ping-Li wanted to make the best kite ever-one that would fly higher than any other kite. He went to the kite shop owned by Mr. Fo to buy the paper, sticks, and string that he needed. Mr. Fo gave Ping-Li a warning: “You must paint your kite before you fly it or the emperor of the sky will be angry.” Ping-Li took his purchases and went to sit on the temple steps to build his kite.

The temptation to fly his new, unpainted kite on the way home was irresistible, and Ping-Li succumbed, flew his kite until he was tired. Sleeping on a hillside, he dreamed that his kite was the best kite of all. The emperor of the sky came down in his dragon ship and said to the boy, “Your kite is the most boring kite in the sky! Come up here, now!” Ping-Li climbed into the emperor’s dragon ship, where he was told to paint his kite and to make it better than all the other kites in the ship. At home, Ping-Li worked hard at his painting, and when he flew his painted kite, the other children watched in amazement. It flew higher, and was bolder, than any kite. But-who was that smiling down at him from the sky?

The author, who studied at the Academy of Visual Arts in Breda, the Netherlands, is a professional illustrator and portrait painter. This is her first book. The deep colors of each oil painting are harmonious and soothing, and there has been a great deal of attention paid to aspects of the Chinese culture on each page. One can almost sense being an onlooker in the unfolding story.

This book has an excellent mixture of words and pictures, and would be an easy story for an elementary school student to read. The colorful, detailed paintings are good stepping-stones for young children to use their imaginations and make up their own stories. Not only is this book a delightful story but it is also a good introduction to Chinese culture. It’s an especially good resource for an elementary school library, as it can be used in both reading and social studies classes.