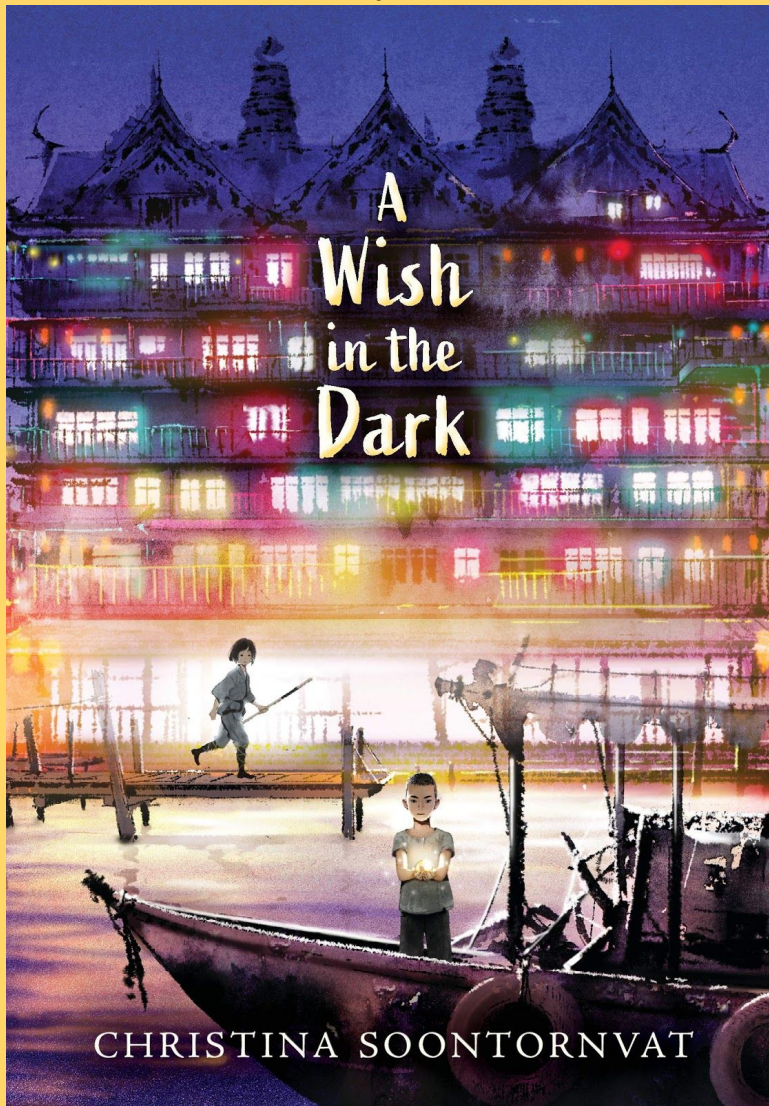




## Middle Reader Lesson Plan

*A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat



GUIDED ANTI-BIAS/ANTI-RACIST READING | GRADES 4+



**INTRODUCTION**

This lesson is divided into 4 sections that are designed to follow along with the book *A Wish in the Dark* by Christina Soontornvat. Each section focuses on reading comprehension, critical thinking, and self-reflection based on the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards. We provide discussion questions, reflection prompts, and activities as guides.

**CHECK OUT OR PURCHASE THE BOOK**

Find the book at your local library, or purchase the book from the [Reading Is Resistance Book Shop](#). 10% commission goes back into our organization for operating costs, and another 10% is donated to independent bookstores.

**OBJECTIVES**

This guided reading lesson is designed to be part of a larger life-long commitment to anti-racist teaching and learning for the student and the facilitator. Reading Is Resistance sees reading as an opportunity to seed deeper conversations and opportunities for action around racial equity in our communities. We hold the belief that being anti-racist is a process of learning (and unlearning) over time.

The [Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards](#) (focused on Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action) serve as guides for our work.

**TEACHING TOLERANCE STANDARDS (GRADES 3-5)<sup>1</sup> COVERED IN THIS LESSON**

Identity Domain #3	Identity Domain #4	Diversity Domain #6	Diversity Domain #10	Justice Domain #12	
I know and like who I am and can comfortably talk about my family and myself and describe our various group identities.	I feel good about my many identities and know they don't make me better than people with other identities.	I interact with people who are similar to and different from me, and I show respect to all people.	I can explain how the way groups of people are treated today, and the way they have been treated in the past, shapes their group identity and culture.	I can recognize and describe unfairness and injustice in many forms including attitudes, speech, behaviors, practices and laws.	
Justice Domain #13	Justice Domain #14	Action Domain #16	Action Domain #17	Action Domain #19	Action Domain #20
I am aware that biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws	I know that all people (including myself ) have certain advantages	I am concerned about how people (including myself ) are	I know how to stand up for myself and for others when faced with exclusion,	I will speak up or take action when I see unfairness, even if those around me do	I will work with friends, family and community members to make our

<sup>1</sup> [Teaching Tolerance Standards](#)



and institutions limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.	and disadvantages in society based on who they are and where they were born.	treated and feel for people when they are excluded or mistreated because of their identities.	prejudice and injustice.	not, and I will not let others convince me to go along with injustice.	world fairer for everyone, and we will plan and coordinate our actions in order to achieve our goals.
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## Section One

pp. 1-87

### SUMMARY

Pong and Somkit are 9-year-old boys who are more like brothers than friends. They grow up in a Thailand inspired, magical world, captive on the island that holds Namwon Prison because their mothers gave birth while incarcerated there.

Everything changes for Pong when a visit from the Governor, admired for giving the city of Chattana magical light, reveals that he is not the hero he was thought to be.

Pong escapes and finds himself taken in by Father Cham and living in a monastery where he is certain he'll live undiscovered until the prison warden and his daughter Nok appear at the monastery gates and the threat of being found out becomes very real.

“ We have to look around and think about what's fair and who it's fair for. ”  
Middle Grade Advisory Team Member

### DISCUSS

- ❑ Let's talk about Pong/Somkit and Nok are affected by where they are born (the physical location) and to whom they are born (their mothers). What do you notice? What does this make you think about? What feelings are coming up for you? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #14**
- ❑ Describe out loud, write the details of, or draw a map of how power works in Chattana. Who has power and who does not? Where do they live? What are the other details that tell us more about how power works? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #12**
- ❑ Describe out loud, write the details of, or draw a map of how justice works in Chattana. Who is worthy of just treatment? Who is punished for "unjust" acts? What are "unjust" acts? This is something we will be thinking about throughout the book, so keep your written or drawn map...and consider recording your out loud description. What are the details that tell us more about how justice works? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #12**

### REFLECT

- ❑ List all of your group identities that you know of right now. **IDENTITY DOMAIN #3**
- ❑ Would you be the same if you took away one of your group identities? How so? How not? Do people know all of your group identities when they first meet you? How do people get to know other people's group identities? **IDENTITY DOMAIN #3**

## Section Two

pp. 88-183

### SUMMARY

In this section of the book, we learn out more about who Nok is, what she believes, and what makes her start to have doubts about her worldview.

At the monastery, Pong gets a final blessing from Father Cham, and in the marketplace, Nok finally recognizes Pong as the runaway from the prison. Nok tries to catch Pong in order to restore her family's reputation, but he narrowly escapes and clings onto a barge that is headed to Chattana.

With their reputation as upholders of the law sullied once again, Nok's family decides to head back to the city. Nok's mother asks her/orders her to stay and attend the village school, but Nok has other plans.

*“ If the Governor is magic, he can make any color of orbs available for anyone. He also can make enough for everyone. So, why doesn't he? ” -- Middle Grade Advisory Team*

### DISCUSS

- ❑ When a young boy steals a fresh baked sweet from a stall in the market, what is Pong's idea of how the kid can make things right? What is Nok's idea of how to make things right? Why are their ideas of "what is right" so different? What are you curious about when it comes to "right" versus "wrong" in this story? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #13 & #14**
- ❑ How do you think having brighter or dimmer light in their homes, shops, and other spaces impacts the people in the violet orb community? In the golden orb community? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #12**

### REFLECT

- ❑ When Pong arrives in Chattana, we learn more about which people can buy which magical orbs (p. 120). What do we find out? How does this make you feel? **JUSTICE DOMAIN #12**
- ❑ Can you imagine other ways that the Governor could use his magical gift in the city? Is the way he is using it the only way? **RADICAL IMAGINATION**

## Section Three

pp. 184-276

### SUMMARY

Pong is reunited with Somkit and living in a bustling communal space for those with few monetary resources.

After seeing firsthand that the system of light orbs and advantages that the Governor has in place is unfair, much like the justice system, he agrees to support Somkit and Ampai who are planning a peaceful protest.

Pong realizes Nok is close and makes plans to head to sea. Somkit gets wind of this and won't let him leave alone. The two get caught by police and thrown in a horse stall...where they surprisingly also encounter Nok, who has been imprisoned for challenging the Governor and his beliefs.

“ How do we know what's just or right? How do we decide when we get told so many wrong stories about the world? ” -- *Middle Grade Book Club Participant*

### DISCUSS

- Describe the moment when Nok's understanding of justice and doing the "right" thing finally changes in a big way. **DIVERSITY DOMAIN #10**
  - Even though Nok has been trying to capture Pong ever since she saw him at the monastery, he rescues her from the police. Why? **ACTION DOMAIN #19**
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## Section Four

pp. 277-END

### SUMMARY

When Mud House burns in a terrible fire, the community decides to proceed with their peaceful march. They come together to remake the golden orbs, and Nok, Somkit, and Pong all have the opportunity to dig deep to show what they really believe and stand for.

### DISCUSS

- ❑ The author Christina Soontornvat pays special attention to the role of the heart in being a leader, fighting back against unfair treatment, and inspiring community. How is the heart an important part of community action? **ACTION DOMAIN #16**
  - ➡ Example 1: Pong realizes “it wasn’t Ampai’s words that people had been willing to follow -- not her words: her heart” (301). What was so special about the way Ampai led?
  - ➡ Example 2: “Even after his mistake with the Governor, he’d never given up trying to make a better world. Not with wishes or with magic. He had fanned the embers of people’s hearts and sent them out into the world to do extraordinary things” (336).
  
- ❑ What does this book teach us about how to make change even when it seems impossible? How might this teach us something that we can keep in mind when we want to take action for things we believe in? **ACTION DOMAIN #20**

### REFLECT

- ❑ What are the special abilities (small and big, from silent stepping to spire fighting) that end up helping Pong, Nok, and Somkit to fight injustice? Make a list. Then, reflect on why the author gave these character these particular characteristics and how each character’s characteristics work together in the end. **IDENTITY DOMAIN #4**
  - ❑ Talk about a time when you stood up for yourself. What kind of treatment were you asking for? **ACTION DOMAIN #17**
  - ❑ Talk about a time when you stood up for someone else or your community. Why did you do so? What kind of treatment or action were you asking for? **ACTION DOMAIN #17**
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## What's Next?

### RESOURCES

- ❑ [Read an interview with the author.](#)
- ❑ Try the [Four Pebbles Meditation](#), a breathing exercise that can help with anxiety

### WRITING PROMPT IDEAS

- ❑ Personal Essay : What are the special abilities (big and small) that you have? How might these abilities help you to work for fairness in the world? Write an essay on your special abilities and how they can help you contribute to justice. Use specific examples from your own experience. **IDENTITY DOMAIN #4 & RADICAL IMAGINATION**
- ❑ Compare and Contrast Essay: Throughout the book, Soontornvat gives us examples of how the idea of justice works in different communities and families. For example, justice works in a particular way in Namwon, in the streets of Chattana, at the monastery, and in the Mud House.

Write a compare and contrast essay exploring the ways that justice works similarly or differently in each setting. Which setting or settings has more justice? What belief do you hold about how justice should work? Which setting correlates most with your belief and why? **IDENTITY DOMAIN #4**

### READ NEXT

*A Wish in the Dark* by  
Christina Soontornvat

*Bayou Magic* by  
Jewell Parker Rhodes

*Ghost Squad* by  
Claribel A. Ortega

*The Way to Rio Luna*  
by Zoraida Cordova

