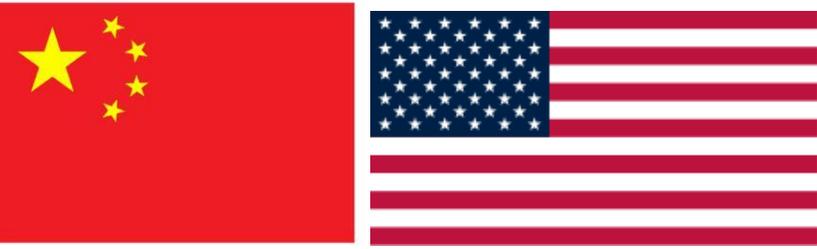


**Younger
Nominee**



7

Hui Li



Hui Li – Author & Illustrator



When she was 11, she had earned the highest calligraphy rank of a Kudan, or 9-dan.



**Younger
Nominee**



7

Hui Li

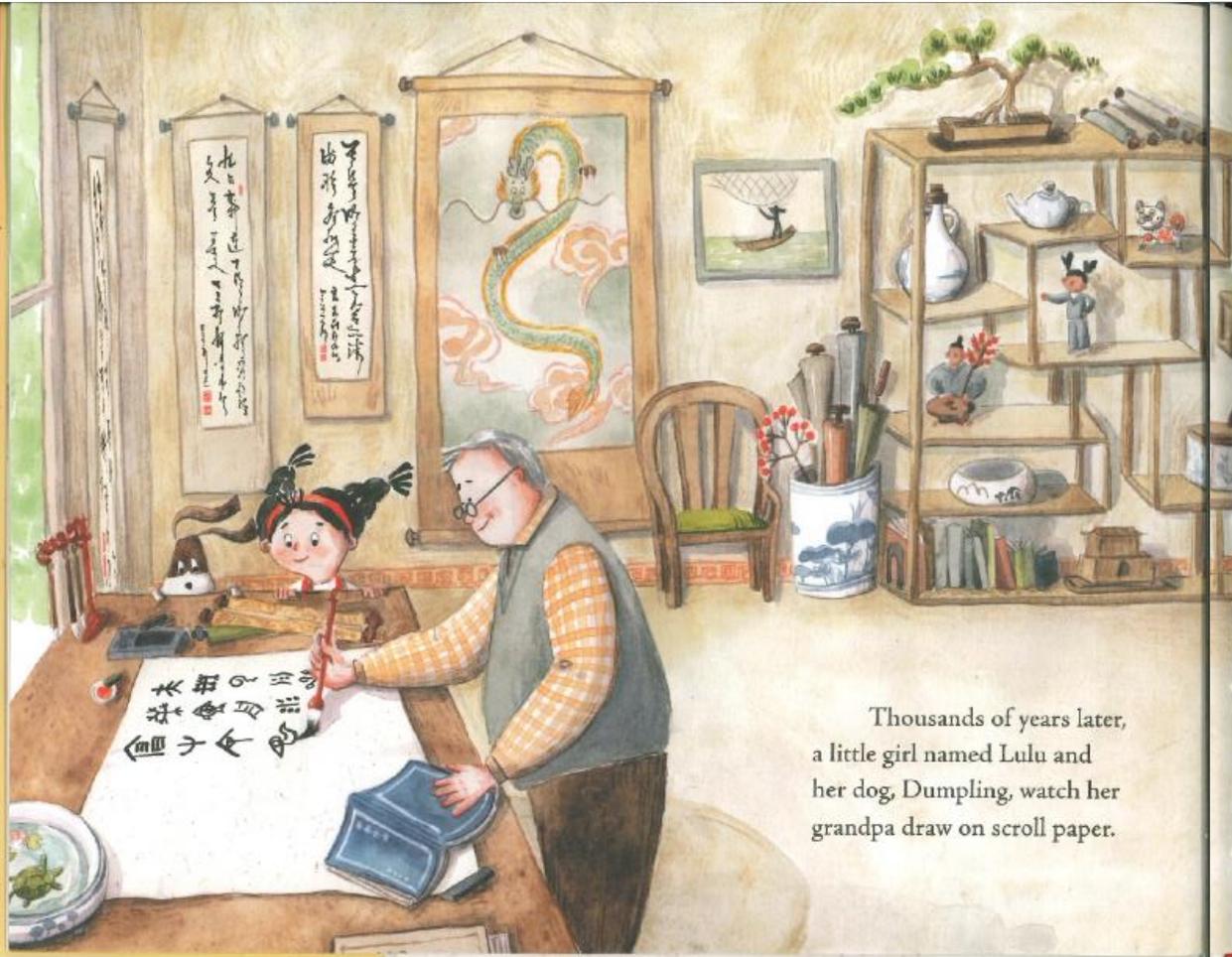


A piece of oracle bone inscribed with ancient Chinese characters (1711–1066 BCE).

Thousands of years ago in China, the Chinese people carved picturelike characters on animal bones and tortoiseshells, called oracle bones. In this way, they recorded events and asked questions of their ancestors and the highest god. A fortune-teller would heat the oracle bones until they cracked. They would examine the bones carefully and predict the future based on the pattern of cracks. The oracle bone inscriptions are believed to be the foundation of Chinese characters.

Some of the images the Chinese people carved:

☁	air, fog	竹	bamboo	倉	barn	鳥	bird
舟	boat	栗	chestnut tree	子	child	蜂	chive
☁	cloud	田	crop field	交	crossed	舞	dance
鹿	deer	犬	dog	門	door	龍	dragon
柵	fence	火	fire	魚	fish	巾	flag
花	flower	艹	grass	宀	house	葉	leaf
夫	man	山	mountain	網	net	叅	old man
宮	palace	雨	rain	虹	rainbow	米	rice
車	ride	川	river	石	rock	雞	rooster
走	run away	子	son, kid	弦	string	日	sun
吞	swallow	高	tall	雷	thunder	鎮	township
龜	turtle	水	water	女	woman	瑟	zither



Thousands of years later,
a little girl named Lulu and
her dog, Dumpling, watch her
grandpa draw on scroll paper.



You drew a bird,
Grandpa?

Yes, Lulu. It's the ancient
Chinese character for BIRD,
which looks like a bird.

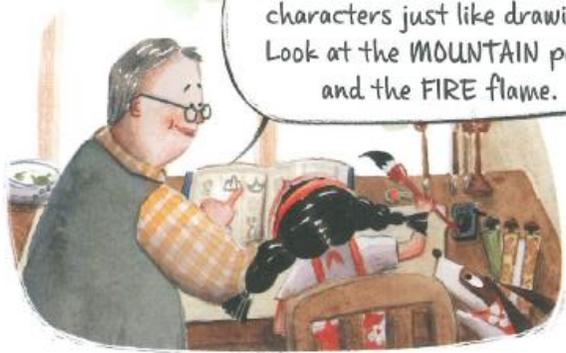
Would you like
to try, Lulu?



This is fun!
Teach me more
characters, Grandpa!



Our ancestors created many characters just like drawings. Look at the MOUNTAIN peaks and the FIRE flame.



Wow, Grandpa! I want to draw them all!



Let's draw the character for DOOR, Dumpling!



Woof, woof!





Dumpling, where are we?
Is that a BIRD character?



Hello, birdy!



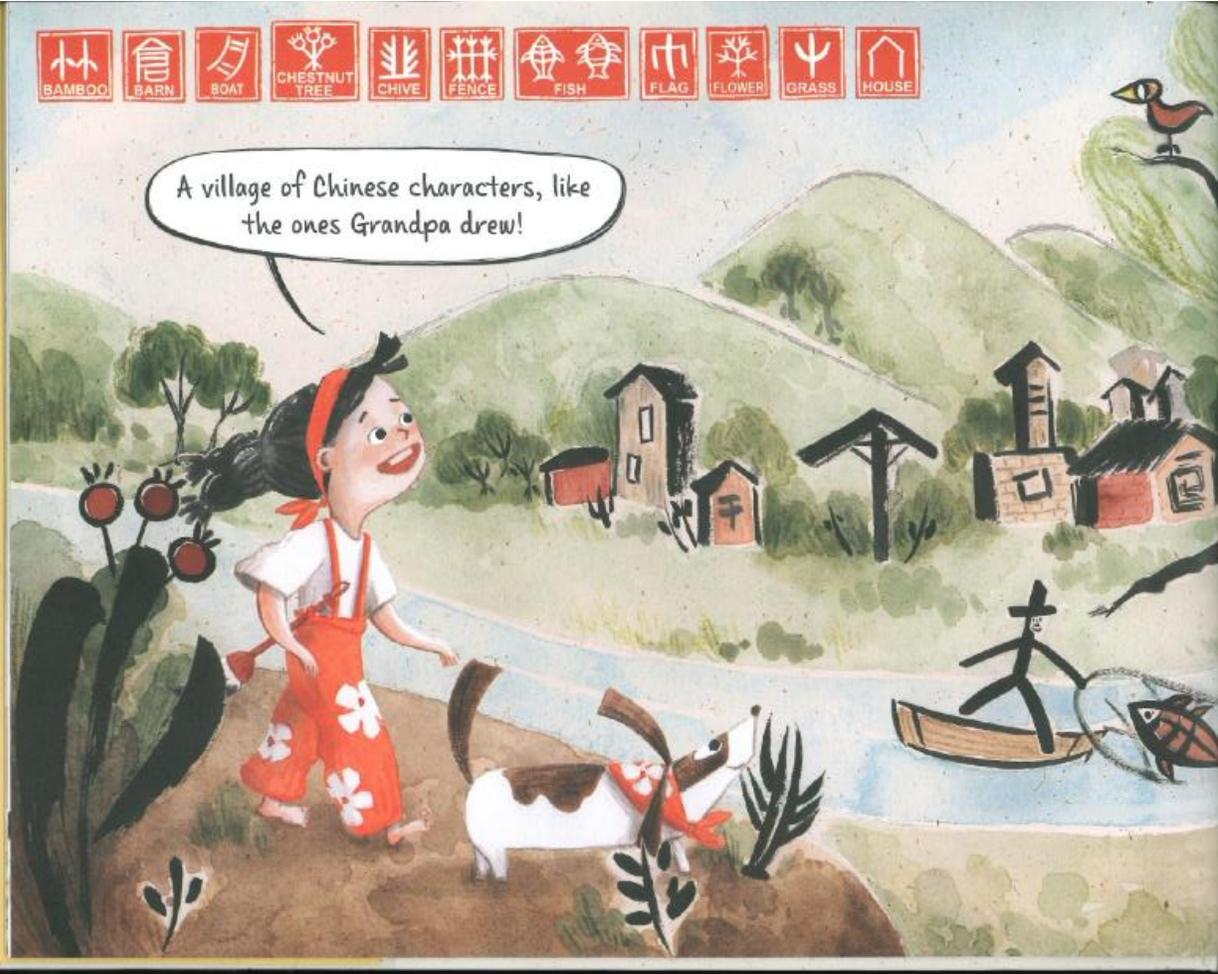
Wait for us!



Look, Dumpling!
There's a village.



A village of Chinese characters, like the ones Grandpa drew!



CHILD OLD MAN SON, KID

ZITHER



CROSSED DOG STRING WATER





What's that sound,
Dumpling?

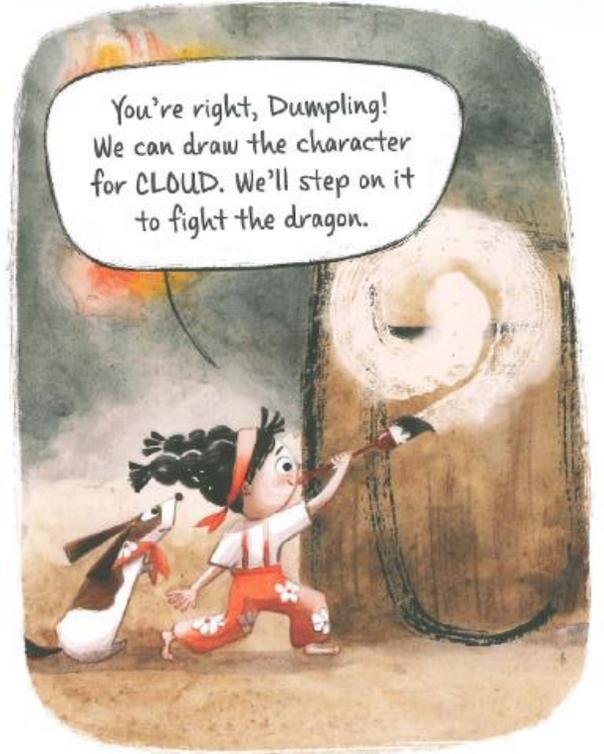


Oh no!
A FIRE-DRAGON!



Come back,
Dumpling!





Hold on tight, Dumpling!
The dragon is too close!



I'll draw the
character for
THUNDER!



Uh-oh! The dragon
is throwing us
into the air!
My brush! Help!



Thank you, birdy!



Cough,
cough.

I have another idea, Dumpling!
I'll draw the character for RAIN
to quench the flame.



A character with a white shirt and red pants with white floral patterns is floating in a dark blue, swirling liquid. The liquid has white, brushstroke-like patterns. A small boat with two figures is visible in the distance. A speech bubble is positioned above the character.

We need more water!
I'll draw the character
for RIVER!









The village looks beautiful in the sunset, Dumpling.

Woof, woof!

Time to go home?

I hope I can come back!
Thank you, dragon!
Thank you, birdy!



Let's draw the character for DDDR.



What a strange dream I had, Lulu.



I became a bird and gave you a brush to paint ancient Chinese characters.



You did, Grandpa! Come see!



Dumpling and I even made friends with the dragon.



Author's Note

I have two special memories from growing up in China: One is eating candied hawthorn berries, a fruit covered in caramelized sugar just like candied apples, and the other is drawing Chinese characters with big paintbrushes.

Some say that Chinese is the most difficult language in the world, with over 50,000 characters throughout time. Each character has a different look. Among them are hundreds of pictograms, characters that represent certain ideas, objects, or deeds. Each pictorial representation has a unique history of its own. They have been stylized over centuries. For example, the earliest form of "bird" is ; it turned into , and finally to what it looks like today: 鳥 (niǎo). Its shape has changed radically over time.

Combining ideas in abstract ways can create more characters. When a traveler meets a friend from the same town, they sit down and have a meal together. This makes  (xiāng), which means "township" or "hometown." Another example is the character  (lín), made by two trees  (mù), side by side, which stands for "woods." Adding one more tree would then make the character for "forest," or  (sēn).

When I was a child, I explored the world of Chinese characters. I drew on rice paper just like Lulu. Every character sparked my imagination. Later, when I wanted to know more about them, I discovered a book called 《說文解字》 (*Shuō Wén Jiě Zì*), an ancient dictionary compiled by scholar Xu Shen (c. 58 – c. 148 CE). I learned the pictographic origin, evolution, and composition of many traditional, complex Chinese characters. The strokes of some of these characters were reduced around the 1950s and 1960s, which created today's simplified Chinese characters. In this book, I illustrated the early Chinese characters, which have evolved into the traditional, complex Chinese characters. I've always wanted to share this experience with readers young and old. Imagine if every character you draw has its own story. . . .

—Hui Li

