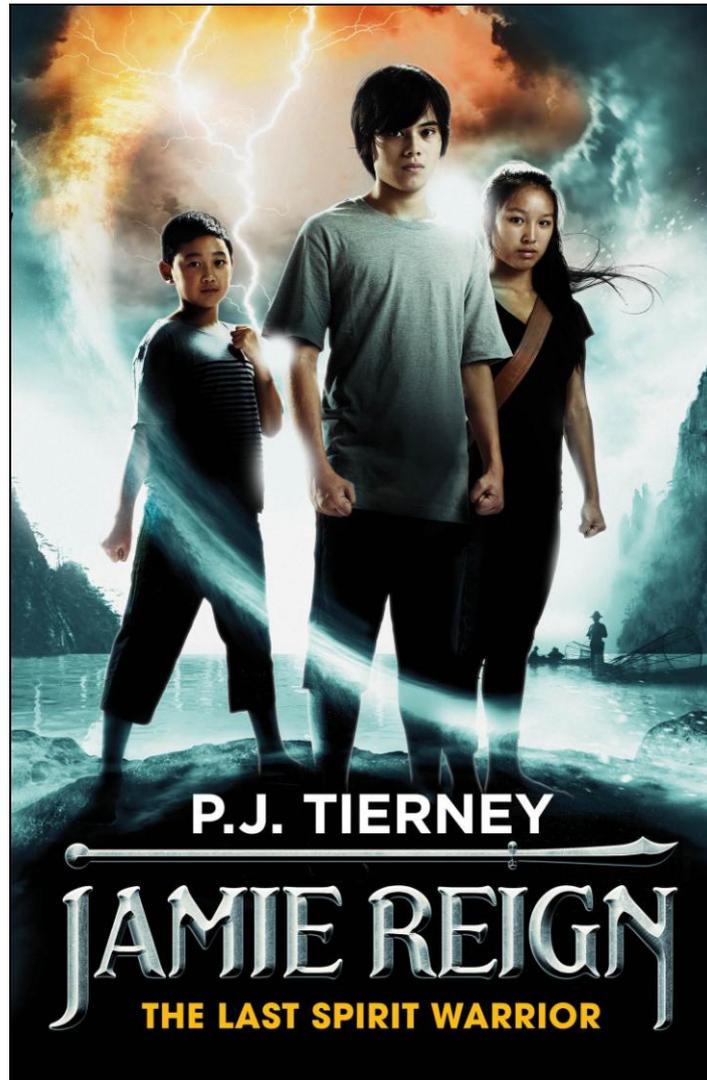


Jamie Reign The Last Spirit Warrior

Teacher's notes

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Introduction

'You are like that boat, Jamie. You leave a wake in the Way.' (p 287)

In this novel's prologue, when Master Wu, the legendary King Fu master, sees the dragon emerge, he knows that it denotes an auspicious day. For the 'Ki-Lin' is the king of the 360 beasts on earth and one of the four most auspicious animals of China. On this day, 5 February, New Year's Eve, it is also Jamie Reign's twelfth birthday, and 'the Year of the Dragon again' (p 10).

Jamie Reign works on his father Hector's tugboat, *The Swift*, which is based at Sai Chun, a small Chinese fishing village. Jamie is half Chinese; his mother Mayling left Hector when she became pregnant and her Uncle Yang deposited the baby with him on the day of his birth. Because of his father's alcoholic temper, Jamie has become very adept at doing what Hector wants, and trying to be invisible. He has also a special talent which makes him useful aboard a boat, 'he was able to find things lost at sea. If he closed his eyes and concentrated really hard, he could visualise what they were looking for.' (p 17) When, on the day after his birthday, New Year's Day, they encounter *The Seabird*, a fishing boat which is taking in water, Jamie is horrified to observe Hector's ruthlessness in not assisting them to bail out or to right their vessel but instead forcing them to take his line, for 'in accordance to International maritime law, by accepting the salvage line the Chinese captain had handed over ownership of his prized trawler to the Captain of *The Swift*.' (p 23)

Jamie has always wanted to learn the Kung Fu style fighting developed by the legendary Master Wu, but with no money, he has little hope of being able to take classes. When, after the salvage trip, he visits his older friend Feng Chow, who is an expert in Wu-style Kung Fu, he finds himself the target of contempt from local villagers. Low See Fut threatens him and pushes his hand down on a table, and the 'plastic fuses with the heat of his palm' (p 33) indicating that he has yet another strange power. He then makes new friends in the Sampan boy, Wing Choo, and Lucy Wang, who is one of a famous dynasty, as the daughter of the wealthy media magnate DeiWei Wang, and is also a master of Kung Fu. He and Lucy encounter some bully boys who are dispelled by Lucy's tactics but also by the silver orbs which hurtle towards them, and which Jamie later learns that he has 'summoned'. Mr Fan arrives in the village with a young girl named Jade on a mission to retrieve something from a mysterious reef, but really to find the 'Spirit Warrior'. Hector takes him out and after opening a salvaged box, is stung by a swarm of insects. Mr Fan tells Jamie that a rogue spirit has taken possession of him. He recognises in Jamie something special and explains that he is looking for potential 'Warriors of the Way'. Jamie learns that Jade, Lucy and Wing are also trainees, and during an initial training session they discover he has yet another skill – finger locking. He also discovers that he has no 'spirit guide' as others do, so Mr Fan sets out to find him a talisman to protect him, a monkey which Jamie names Jet. If Jamie is the Spirit Warrior, then he is linked to the Great Guide and will be pursued by the evil Zheng who has already sent his men to the village to retrieve the treasure.

He also finds out from his best friend Bohai that according to the Chinese calendar, this should be a 'golden era' but that something has gone astray in the world. When he rescues Wing from a typhoon they are forced to tack to the Penglai Islands and to the secret camp at Chai Wu where Mr Fan and the great Master Wu are training the Warriors. He discovers a further skill in being able to

'View'; to see further and with more accuracy than can others. He also discovers that Jade is a 'Recollector' who can see things before they happen. Jamie has had a loveless childhood with Hector, who has failed to educate him. He dreams of the mother Mayling who abandoned him as a baby and yearns to find her again. So when he discovers that she was also a trainee under Master Wu, he is filled with new hope.

But how he is going to succeed in his training, when he can't read and is hopeless at Kung Fu? The novel comes to a climax with a confrontation with Zheng in which Jamie reveals his strengths and realises that he must accept his role as Spirit Warrior with the help of his friends in order to fulfil his destiny.

About the Author

PJ (Paula) Tierney is a new and exciting author for children. She grew up in the Blue Mountains, NSW, and studied writing at the University of Wollongong before embarking on a career in theatre production and has worked all over the world. While working on a production for the Hong Kong Handover Celebrations with her Chinese-born partner James, she lived in China for six months, and also met the famous Jackie Chan. These experiences led to the writing of the Jamie Reign series.

See Paula Tierney's website: www.paulatierney.com.au

Author Inspiration

Paula says:

'The inspiration for *Jamie Reign: The Last Spirit Warrior* comes from a tiny fishing village on the Southern side of Hong Kong Island where a little boy once lived. Like Jamie Reign, this boy was abandoned by his Chinese mother and raised by his English father. He lived on a barge, dived the wrecks of the South China Sea and tried his best to avoid his father's rage. When this little boy grew up, he moved to Australia where the stories of his childhood both fascinated and saddened me, and became the basis for Jamie Reign's adventures. The child from Tai Tam is James and his is the first name on the dedication page.'

Curriculum Topics

Characters

- **The Significance of Character:** Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this work there are several major characters (some of whom figure briefly in the action) and a cast of minor ones.

Discussion Point: Apart from Jamie, which character did you consider to be central to the novel's plot and themes, and why?

Major Characters:

Jamie Reign

Wing Choo

Jade

Lucy Wang

'Sifu' Yulong Fan

Master Wu

Discussion Point: Which of the main characters did you find most appealing, and why?

Minor Characters:

Hector

Feng Chow

Old Mama Chow

Mrs Leung

Bohai Leung

Mrs Choo

Low See Fut

Cheng, Morris

the Sea Captain

Discussion Point: Is there a minor character who might have played a larger part? Why would you have liked to have seen more of this character?

Character Arcs are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel.

Activity: Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour.

Language and Literacy

- ***This novel is a fantasy which draws on Chinese cultural history.*** The tropes of fantasy include a battle between good and evil, a secondary world, suspension of disbelief, etc.

Activity: Study the conventions of fantasy. Then draw up a chart and make a list of where this novel falls into these conventions.

Discussion Point: How closely does this fantasy rely on Chinese beliefs to inform its magical world?

Activity: This is a seafaring adventure story as well as a story of martial arts. Discuss some of the exciting scenes in the book, and have students write a similar story based on these models.

- ***Narrative Structure*** — The novel follows a **chronological structure** although past events are referred to throughout.

Activity: Create a timeline of all the incidents referred to in the book.

- ***Narrative Perspective*** — This work is written in third person from Jamie's perspective.

Discussion Point: How else might this story have been told? Could it have been written in first person? Why/why not?

- ***Use of Literary Devices such as Simile and Metaphor*** — Examples: 'Floundering about like a fish out of water' (p 278); 'A fire burned inside his belly.' (p 369)

Activity: Make a list of similes and metaphors you discover in this text. Discuss their meaning and effect. Then try to say the same thing using another expression.

- ***The Cover of a book is both an ideogram for the contents and a marketing tool.***

Activity: Create an alternative cover for this book using appropriate symbolism to suggest what the main themes and ideas in the novel are. Write a blurb for the back cover as well. Make a display of the covers and discuss the differences amongst the students' interpretations.

History and Culture

Chinese Culture

- Jamie's mother was Chinese and he lives in China, so the novel includes many references to Chinese culture.

Discussion Point: What did you discover about Chinese culture that you hadn't known before?

- The Chinese calendar works on a twelve-year cycle 'so comes full circle by your twelfth year'. (p 5).

Activity: Read more about the Chinese calendar and the various signs of the Zodiac (animal symbols) it includes. What year is it this year in the Chinese calendar? What does it denote? What year were you born and what sign of the Zodiac were you born under? [See **Bibliography.**]

- According to Chinese astrology our universe consists of five basic elements: Metal, Water, Wood, Fire and Earth.

Activity: Research these concepts further, and discuss whether they relate to the novel at all.

- The celebration for Jamie's friend Bohai's birthday included an exotic banquet.

Activity: Jamie likes to cook and is quite adept at making noodle dishes. When he goes to the training school Chia Wu, he is able to feast on many of Mrs Choo's recipes. Visit Paula Tierney's website for some links to 'Jamie's Recipes'. Read more about Chinese cuisine. Have a Chinese feast at your school.

- Chinese herbalism and healing is mentioned several times in the novel.

Activity: Research this topic further as well.

- The Chinese use symbols or written characters to denote many words. In this novel the Symbols for Earth (Square) and Heaven (Circle) (p 315) are discussed.

Activity: Research this symbolism further. [See **Bibliography.**]

Values

- This novel is about the values implicit in the two texts (by Sun Tzu and Lao Tzu) which Jamie studies with the other Warriors.

Activity: Have students research some of the values promoted in these texts and relate them to how Jamie confronts challenges in the novel.

- There are certain ethics observed by seamen and women. For example, Jamie is upset when his father takes ownership of *The Seabird*, and the villagers are very angry about his actions, as well.

Discussion Point: Discuss the moral implications of having the power that Hector has as a tugboat owner, and the duty he has to perform his tasks ethically.

Themes

Individual Confidence and Maturation

Key Quote: 'For the first time ever, he wasn't embarrassed to be Jamie Reign.' (p 104)

- Jamie has always lacked confidence in his own abilities due to both his family situation and his lack of literacy.

Discussion Point: What makes him gain confidence? Is it his new found skills or is it the confidence in him which his friends demonstrate?

- Bravery is a word often used to describe soldiers in war.

Discussion Point: Is there a better word to describe how Jamie responds to his enemies in this novel?

- Spiritual guidance is another central aspect of Jamie's rite of passage in growing from a boy into a man. He is on the cusp of young adulthood.

Discussion Point: What role does spiritual guidance play in Jamie's story?

Absent Parents

Key Quote: 'Is it the same as my mother's?' Jamie asked. 'Is that where I get it from?' (p 242)

- Jamie has always felt a great sense of loss having been abandoned as a boy, and having no knowledge of his mother Mayling.

Discussion Point: Do you think that the search for a mother is a central theme in this book?

- His father has been an ineffective and abusive parent, and yet Jamie has done all he could to try and please him.

Discussion Point: Is his behaviour driven by fear, or by a desire to be loved?

The Discipline of Martial Arts

Key Quote: 'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting' Sun Tzu

- Kung Fu is an art which is not only about physical skills but also mental control and spiritual discipline.

Discussion Point: Some students may have taken classes in martial arts. Discuss with them what they have learned from such classes.

Activity: The *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu is the work which the 'Warriors of the Way' study. Tao is considered the father of the Chinese spiritual tradition of Taoism. Research this further.

[See **Bibliography.**]

Discussion Point: Master Wu quotes the *Tao Te Ching* (p 380). Discuss this quote with your students.

Activity: Jamie also has to study *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. Research this further. [See **Bibliography.**]

Activity: Find the various parts in the story where Jamie takes notes from the book to use in his fighting (eg pp 352-3). Discuss how useful such dictums would be in dealing with problems in daily life?

Activity: Watch a Kung Fu fighting DVD to enhance the students' understanding of the art. There was a famous television series *Kung Fu* (1972-) which teachers might be able to select excerpts from. You might also watch the computer-animated comedy *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) or sequels as part of this unit of study.

Activity: On her website Paula Tierney mentions actor and martial arts expert Jackie Chan as an influence on the series. Students might also visit his website, or watch one of his movies such as *The Karate Kid* (2010).

Activity: On Paula Tierney's website she has a link to 'Fighting Techniques'. Share this information with your students. Practice some of the stances, hand positions, and movements listed on the webpage.

The Importance of Reading

Key Quote: 'You know, reading is such an important skill...' (p 160)

- 'Jamie wants to be a Kung Fu master and warrior but finds that his lack of reading skills prevents him from studying the foundation texts of the art.'

Discussion Point: How important is reading? What things in ordinary life require us to read? Is reading for pleasure also important?

Fate and Destiny

Key Quote: 'If our life's purpose is not achieved the consequences can cascade through time.' (p 150)

- Both Jamie and Jade feel they have some connection to a destiny which they fear.

Discussion Point: Do you believe in destiny? Are our lives mapped out for us?

Discussion Point: Does our date of birth determine our future?

Further Questions and Activities

Key Quotes

The following quotes relate to some of the **Themes** above. You might like to present any one of them (or two related quotes) to your students as a catalyst for further discussion, or as the subject of an essay outlining how the quote reflects a central theme in this novel:

'Sometimes Jamie wondered how long someone could hold on to a dream without the courage to actually pursue it.' (p 26)	'When your body dies, Jamie, your spirit doesn't. It comes back over and over again.'(p 92)
'No, you're not normal. None of us is.'(p 191)	'Sometimes all you can do is breathe and be brave. Sometimes there is no other choice.'(p 220)
'So I shouldn't believe everything I see in the papers?' (p 232)	'Enemy spies must be sought out, tempted with bribes, comfortably housed, and so they will become converted spies ...' (p 262)
' <i>There are no coincidences,</i> ' (p 275)	' <i>Know your enemy and know yourself and you will always prevail.</i> ' (p 288)
'I don't know if I'd want to remember living and dying before.' (p 299)	'Think your way around a problem. Do not act blindly or out of habit.'(p 308)
'Words contain more than meaning, Jamie: they have power. Use that power well.' (p 314)	'Sometimes it is better to strive for greatness than for Victory' (pp 390-1)

Points for Discussion:

1. What does the Prologue in this novel add to your understanding of the subsequent narrative?
2. Jamie has had to rely on his wits and has few people to assist him. What particular qualities (apart from his magical skills) have helped him to survive thus far?
3. What do you think of Jade's behaviour? Is she as fierce as she seems?
4. Feng Chow is like many people who become obsessed with a hobby which they make the mistake of thinking can constitute an entire life. Discuss.
5. Is Mayling really dead? Why did she have a child with Hector and why did she leave Jamie?
6. Jamie rescues Wing twice. What might happen a third time?
7. Who is the least admirable character in this novel, and why?
8. Mr Fan had once been the 'master' to Master Wu. How difficult would it be to assume the role subservient to someone whom you had once taught?
9. What did the ending suggest thematically?
10. This is the first book in a series. What do you think might happen in a sequel to this book?

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Chinese Five Elements

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Jackie Chan <<http://jackiechan.com>>

12 Chinese Zodiac Signs

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