

# TEACHER'S NOTES - LING LI'S LANTERN



## **AUTHOR: Steve Heron**

Steve's passion is to power hope in children, especially through children's literature. He craves to write quality picture books and novels that engage children, at the same time, aid them to handle the tricky things in life. He aspires to keep it real and unreal for kids in his books, some for fun, some to stir hope.

Maximus, his first middle-grade novel was published by Serenity Press in early 2018 and is receiving positive reviews.

- First stand-alone picture book, 'Ling Li's Lantern' MidnightSun Publishing 2020.
- Picture Book 'Where Ya Goin'?' due for release with Wild Eyed Press mid-2021.
- Picture book 'Harold the Horrid' shortlisted with 2017 Greenleaf Buds Writing competition.
- The short story 'The Money Pouch' was long-listed in the BUZZWords Magazine Short Story comp 2018.

Steve completed a Diploma of Children's Writing and Publishing in 2015 with the Australian College. He has recently semi-retired from 40 years of pastoral work with children to focus on writing. Steve is a member of SCBWI (Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators).

Steve is the founder of Nurture Works Foundation and developed the acclaimed 'BUZ – Build Up Zone' social and emotional programs and initiatives used in many schools throughout Western Australia.

In 2016, he received an Order of Australia Medal for contribution to the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

His first dabble with writing for children led to a series of six picture books in the 'Feel Safe Feel Right Series' published by Nurture Works in 2007.

Author of 'BUZology' 2011 and 'Bullyproofing' 2013 – books for people working with children.

Steve has extensive experience working with children in schools and is no stranger to doing presentations to kids. He has a positive web and social media platform ready to promote his books and presentations.

A champion of wellbeing for children, he has been called an affirmative vandal and a hooligan of hope.

<https://steveheron.com/>



**ILLUSTRATOR: Benjamin Johnston**

Benjamin works full-time as a registered architect; however, drawing and illustrating for children have always been his passion. Through his involvement in Children's book illustration and as a father of two, Benjamin has developed an interest in widening his outreach to children through both writing and school presentations.

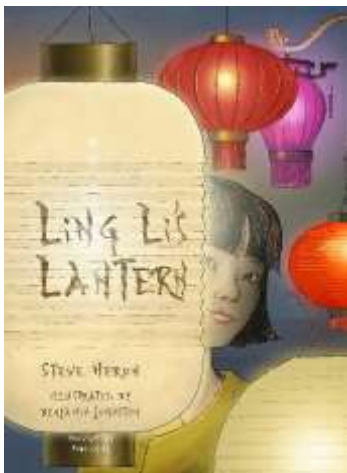
The opportunity of seeing life again through children's eyes is a major influence in creating his work.

As a Children's book illustrator, Benjamin has illustrated the first books in two separate series of stories: the "Skool Rox" series, written by Barton Williams and the "Engibear" series, written by Engineer and Author Andrew King.

Benjamin is a member of SCBWI (Society of Children's Books Writers and Illustrators) and has had his work showcased in the Bologna Illustrators Gallery 2014 through SCBWI International.

As a brief-driven illustrator, Benjamin is keen to ensure that all illustrations work as hard as possible to get the intended message across, be that for a commercial project or for a children's book creation.

<https://unfolddesign.wordpress.com/>



**LING LI'S LANTERN SYNOPSIS**

*"Wisdom without compassion is like a lantern without a flame."*

Ling Li's Lantern is a heart-warming story about compassion, kindness and the true nature of wisdom.

Steve Heron's sagacious storytelling and Benjamin Johnston's meticulous illustrations merge in this delightful tale set in a Chinese village.

Wise man, Da Zhi sends his three children on a quest to nurture their wisdom. Ling Li and her two brothers are each challenged to fill one of three pagodas with something they obtain from a modest sum of money given by their father. The first two children succeed in their task, and the wisdom they demonstrate pleases their father.

Ling Li, the youngest, spends most of the day in the village markets in search of a wise choice. She returns home empty-handed, except for a lamp to guide her way.

*Ling Li's head hangs low. 'Papa I've spent all the coins you gave me and have nothing to fill the pagoda.'*

Word of Ling Li's deeds at the markets had reached her father. He leads her into the third pagoda, where she is delighted with a surprising outcome.

## NOTES FROM THE AUTHOR ABOUT THE ORIGINS OF THE STORY

Steve says the story had been brewing in his head for some time. At first, he wrote it as a small play for a performing arts camp for children. He thought the idea might have come from an old Chinese folktale he heard somewhere, but he discovered the only similar stories came out of the Persian area. Those stories of a King and his three sons are about power and outsmarting siblings. Ling Li's lantern is different; it is about real wisdom and surprising compassion.

Steve visited China and went to the Shanghai World Expo 2010 where he saw a wooden model of a Five Pagoda Wind and Rain Bridge. Captured by its stunning architecture and beauty, he researched the location and included it in his travel itinerary. This took him to the Chengyang Bridge in the Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County.

As Steve walked across this bridge into the village of Chengyang, he imagined it as the setting for Ling Li's Lantern.

Steve was keen for the story to be authentic and culturally respectful. In 2018, while waiting for a connecting flight at Guangzhou Airport on his way to present at the International School of Qingdao, a young Chinese woman approached Steve and asked if she could practice her English. To Steve, it seemed like a serendipitous moment to talk about his book and Chinese cultural sensitivity. When he mentioned that the story could be set in the Chengyang village, she became animated. In her excitement, she told him she had recently been there on vacation and loved the thought his book would be set in such a beautiful place.

On another occasion, Steve was discussing cultural sensitivity with the Senior Librarian at the International School of Qingdao in China. The librarian shed tears as she read the story. She said, 'This is so beautifully written. It reminds me of my childhood and shows great respect for my culture.'

**VALUES** - The story focuses on two central values, wisdom and compassion.

**Wisdom** could be described as the ability to use knowledge and experience to make the right decisions and judgements. Each of the three children demonstrated different aspects of wisdom.

The first being astuteness. Astuteness is the ability to understand a situation and get advantage from it quickly. The first child, Jingming, was quick to carry out the task of filling the first pagoda with bamboo and making a good investment.

The second being cleverness. Cleverness is the ability to understand, learn quickly and easily. The second child Miao worked hard and smart to fill the second pagoda with duck down and feathers. His cleverness is demonstrated in him thinking of something that will fill the space quickly.

The third example of wisdom can be best described as special wisdom. Through Ling Li's compassion, she demonstrates her ability to think of others and her desire to make things better. She is surprised when she discovers the light from her lantern fills the pagoda. Her father draws a connection between her kindness bringing light to the village and the lantern light filling the pagoda.

## **Compassion**

Ling Li demonstrates four acts of compassion.

1. By replacing the broken eggs dropped by the boy and encouraging him.
2. By keeping the lost girl company, feeding her and helping her find her mother.
3. By supporting the magician after his performance by making a contribution.
4. By being generous to the old lady selling necklaces and bringing her good fortune.

## **MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE STORY**

Da Zhi – the father

Jingming – the oldest son

Miao – the middle child, son

Ling Li – the youngest, daughter

Each character's name derives from the English version of Chinese Mandarin words for wisdom.

Da Zhi – means great or big wisdom

Jingming – means sensible, astute wisdom

Miao – means clever wisdom

Ling Li – means bright, clever, quick-witted

## **GEOGRAPHY**

The story is set a Chinese village, not necessarily a particular era or region. It is a make-believe village with components from different parts of China. The Wind and Rain Bridge is influenced by the Five Pagoda Wind and Rain Bridge in Chengyeng. The River, with its Cormorant fishermen, is more common in the Li River area near Guilin. Even though the author thought of Chengyeng as the location, it could be any village in Asia.

## **THE CULTURE**

Some of the clothing suggests costuming from the Qing or Han Dynasty era.

The lanterns suggest that the village could be preparing for the Chinese New Year Lantern Festival, held on the 15<sup>th</sup> (last) day of the Chinese New Year Festival (Late Feb/March in Australia). The other main Chinese Festival that uses lanterns is the Chinese Moon Festival held mid-autumn. (Sept/Oct in Australia)

There is an opportunity to research Chinese festivals.

During the Chinese Lantern Festival, children write riddles on lanterns.

## LITERACY OPPORTUNITY

There is a literacy opportunity in researching these riddles and for children to write their own.

**Riddle:** a question intentionally phrased in a way to require a level of cleverness to ascertain its answer or meaning. Sometimes could be referred to as brain teasers.

Examples of riddles:

What building has the most stories?

*A library.*

What has keys but cannot open doors?

*A piano.*

Paper lanterns can be purchased cheaply in the party section of Department stores or ordered online. Patterns for making paper lanterns can also be found online.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS BEFORE READING THE STORY:

What is wisdom?

What makes someone a wise person?

What does wisdom look like?

Who is a wise person you know?

How can you show someone you are wise?

Brainstorm and write words on a whiteboard associated with wisdom.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK STUDENTS AFTER READING THE STORY:

What is Compassion (or kindness)?

What makes someone kind?

What does compassion look like?

Who is a kind person you know?

How can you show kindness to someone?

Brainstorm and write words on a whiteboard associated with compassion/kindness.

## QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

In the story, Ling Li chooses a plain white lantern. Children could be asked why she would choose a plain white lantern and not one of the fancier ones.

The author, Steve Heron, says: "*Wisdom without compassion is like a lantern without a flame.*" Discuss the meaning of this saying.

## LITERACY LEARNING CAPABILITIES

### Navigate, read and view learning area texts

- Opportunity to read the story to students or have the students read the story independently
- Questions relating to the use of illustrations supporting the text can be used.

### Interpret and analyse learning area texts

- After children have heard or read the story, there is an opportunity to explore the text and the topics covered, Chinese culture, wisdom, compassion. Comprehension questions could be set around the three children and how they completed the task as well as Ling Li's encounters and her acts of compassion.

### Compose spoken, written, visual and multimodal learning area texts

- Opportunity to link the Chinese Lantern Festival with children writing riddles on lanterns. Students could write text on a worksheet in a lantern-shaped template.
- Another option is for Children to write poetry based on some traditional Chinese poetry styles. An example of one of the first poems most Chinese children learn is the Goose, goose, goose poem.

- Goose, goose, goose  
You bend your neck towards the sky and sing.  
Your white feathers float on the emerald water.  
Your red feet push the clear waves.

This pattern can easily be followed.

1. Name a creature
2. Something the creature does
3. Describe the creature
4. Something else the creature does

### Deliver Presentations

- Students could present their riddles or poetry by writing on paper lanterns and displaying the lanterns strung across the classroom.

### Use knowledge of sentence structures

- This could be demonstrated by children writing their riddles and poetry.

### Use knowledge of words and word groups.

- This could be demonstrated by children writing Chinese style poetry.

### Express opinion and point of view

- Students could write a book review expressing how the story made them feel at different stages, what they thought might happen and how they responded at the end of the story. This could include what they liked about the story and what they thought of each of the characters in the story.

Understand how visual elements create meaning

- Students could include in their book review their comments about the illustrations. How did they add to the text? What extra things did the illustrations add to the story? How did the illustrations help to understand the story? Older students could comment on how the images were framed to include the text in suitable ways.

## **CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING CAPABILITIES**

Imagine possibilities and connect ideas

- Students could comment on what other ideas would fit into the story. How else could another character demonstrate their wisdom? What different kinds of people or situations could Ling Li encounter at the market that show her wisdom and compassion?

Think about thinking (metacognition)

- Before the story, students could be asked questions about wisdom and post story, could be asked if the story changed their thinking about wisdom. What made them change their thinking?

Transfer knowledge into new contexts

- If students are to rewrite the story in their own town with themselves as the main character, how would it play out? What kinds of ideas would they use in the new setting?

Apply logic and reasoning

- Students could be asked about each character in the story. What leads them to show their wisdom the way they did? What kind of personality did each of them have?

Draw conclusions and design a course of action

- Present students with a range of scenarios where someone could be shown compassion and ask them what course of action could be taken.

Examples:

- A child in the playground looking lonely
- An old lady drops her shopping bags
- A village in Africa has no clean water
- A child is being picked on by other children
- A friend is sad because her dog died
- A classmate makes a mistake
- The teacher returns after an illness
- Make up others

## **INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING CAPABILITIES**

Investigate culture and cultural identity

- Students could be set a task of comparing Ling Li's lifestyle with their own

## Ling Li's Lantern – Teaching Notes

Explore and compare cultural knowledge, beliefs and practices

- Students could research Chinese festival customs, especially the Lantern Festival at the end of the Chinese New Year Festival.
- This could include making or decorating lanterns (including writing riddles on lanterns)
- The story mentions bamboo rice; there is an opportunity to explore other Chinese foods and the influence of Chinese food in Western countries.

Empathise with others

- Students could be asked to reflect on each of the characters Ling Li meets in the marketplace. How would you feel if you were the person in each instance? The boy who dropped his eggs, the lost girl, the performer, the old lady selling necklaces and the lantern seller.

Reflect on intercultural experiences

- Invite someone from the Chinese community to give a presentation to the class on their culture. Students could be asked to draft questions to ask. Answers could be used in reflection after the visit.
- An opportunity to cook Chinese foods may present.

## **PERSONAL AND SOCIAL CAPABILITIES**

Recognise emotions

- Students could be asked to reflect on the emotions in the story. How were each of the characters feeling? What word could describe the feelings portrayed in the story text and the illustrations?

Understand themselves as learners

- Students could be asked how the story made them feel and if it challenged them to think differently.
- They could be asked if they understand more about compassion or kindness.

Develop reflective practice

- Students could be asked to make a list of things that can be done to show kindness. Maybe they could make themselves a kindness checklist, and as they complete one of the tasks, they can tick it off the list. Discuss in the class afterwards.

Contribute to civil society

- Kindness is not just about how we treat other people. Ask students what different ways they can show kindness in their communities and environments.

Understand relationships

- If children are asked, 'What makes someone a good friend?' the most common answer is 'They are kind.' Students could be asked what kindness looks like. How can you show kindness? How do you know when someone is being kind? Can you make friends



## Ling Li's Lantern – Teaching Notes

without being kind?

## **ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING CAPABILITIES**

### Recognise ethical concepts

- Discussions about the story would bring out the opportunity to recognise ethical concepts, especially that of wisdom and its various forms and compassion and ways to show it.

### Explore ethical concepts in context

- Students could be set the task of writing their own stories that show someone being wise and/or someone showing compassion.

### Reason and make ethical decisions

- Students could be set the task of finding other stories in the library where the characters are challenged to make ethical decisions and show compassion.

### Reflect on ethical action

- As a reflection on the story, students could be challenged to think about why Ling Li acted the way she did. Why did she spend her time and money helping others when her task was to demonstrate her wisdom?

### Examine values

- The story focusses on wisdom and compassion. Students could be asked to make a list of other important values. An idea is to use butchers paper, draw the outline of a student and in the outline students could be asked to write words that show someone is a good person or a good friend. “What makes someone a good person?”

## **VISUAL ARTS - ILLUSTRATIONS - SEE ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES BELOW**

In Benjamin Johnston's words, the role of the illustrator is to ensure that all illustrations work as hard as possible to get the intended message across.

- Often the illustrator tells a side story or adds extra components to enhance the story.
- Can you find any of these components in the illustrations?
- What do the illustrations add to the story?
- How has the illustrator made his mark on the story?

Benjamin Johnston's illustrations have been done using digital media.

For **Ling Li's Lantern**, he began with a **story-board**.

- What is a story-board? Why are they useful?

## **VISUAL ARTS CAPABILITIES**

Consider where and why people make artworks

- Using the illustrator's notes and showing the illustrations, students could be asked how the artwork adds to the story. How do the words and pictures work together in picture books to tell the story?

Describe artworks

- Students could be asked to write in their own words to describe Benjamin's artwork style. How did the illustrations make you feel? What did the illustrations make you think?

Discuss similarities and differences between artworks

- How are Benjamin's illustrations different from other picture books you have read. Children could be asked to choose a book and describe the differences in the artwork.
- Would the illustrations in Ling Li's Lantern have worked as well if a different medium was used? What other styles or mediums may have worked? Would it change the story? How does the choice of illustration medium and style affect the way you read/understand/interpret a story?

Make and share artwork that represent ideas

- Design your own story-board for a story you have written or one you have heard.
- Think about close-ups, distance illustrations and middle distance. Match the text with the illustration.
- Students could make and/or decorate lanterns.
- This could be combined with literacy as students write their riddles on the lanterns.

Collaborate to plan and make artworks that communicate ideas

- Students could be asked how they will display their work, maybe hang in a long string in the classroom.

## Ling Li's Lantern - Illustrator's Notes Benjamin Johnston



Illustrating Ling Li's Lantern was a wonderful opportunity for me to research a different culture and artistic style. The story never expressly sets itself in China, but it is in no doubt intended to be set there. While I am not Chinese, I am married to an Australian-born Chinese and have a strong appreciation of the culture. I wanted to do justice not just the story, but the culture it represents. I know the author Steve, felt the same way when he wrote the story, and even before the story came to me, he had made sure the “voice” of the story was authentically Chinese.

I hope these Illustrator Notes help to explain the research and steps taken to create the final result.

### 1. Setting the story

The first aspect to determine was location and time-period. Steve already had a rough idea of the location as he had included a particular landmark in his story – the “Wind and Rain Bridge” In Chengyang, China – a very lush, green, hilly area with valleys filled with terraced rice paddies.



Chengyang, China



“Wind and Rain Bridge” Chengyang



Traditional Cormorant fishermen in Guilin

For a time period, nothing in the story really highlighted a time, but it was certainly not modern, and definitely pre-industrial. Without going into Chinese history in detail, my assessment of the time period is Qing dynasty and probably the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I then researched what the architecture and fashions of this period would have been.

## Ling Li's Lantern – Teaching Notes



China wasn't my only influence. A family trip to Hong Kong and Japan was a great opportunity to further my research and many pictures from the book come directly from my experiences there – for example the bamboo forest that the eldest brother visits was taken straight from my photos of the bamboo forest of Arashiyama, outside Kyoto.



## 2. Setting the style

Having determined the setting, I then investigated what sort of style illustrations I thought would suit the story. During these investigations, I looked at traditional Chinese paintings of the Qing period – getting books out of the library and even finding an old AGNSW exhibition book at the back of my parents-in-law garage specifically on this subject. The paintings of this period mix heavily stylised landscapes with detailed realism. This, I decided, is what I would try and do as well.



Brush and ink wash are the main techniques used in Qing paintings. I tested out some of these myself using brush pens I had purchased on my Japan trip. But ultimately this wasn't what I ended up using.



## Ling Li's Lantern – Teaching Notes

As well as being an illustrator, I am also an architect, so my knowledge of the history of buildings came in handy, and I wanted to include the buildings and architecture as essential elements in the story. The village and the pagodas feature heavily, so I wanted to make sure they were an authentic backdrop for the characters.

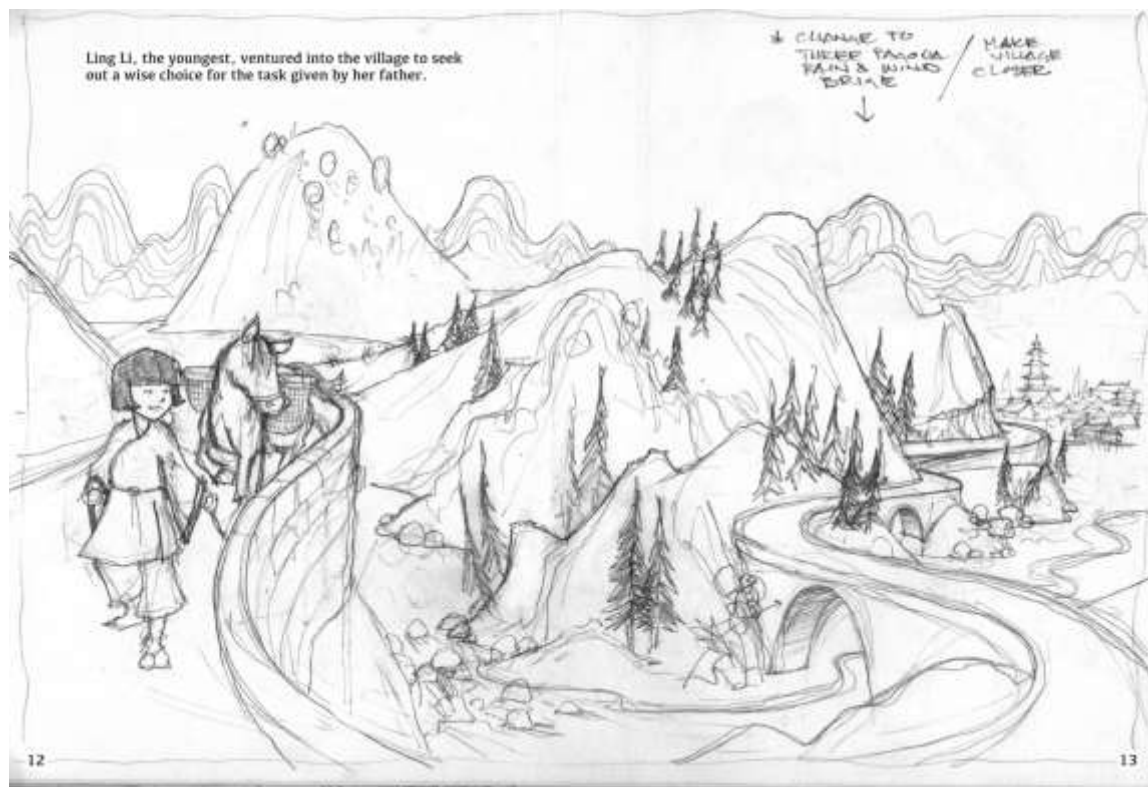


### 3. Character development and story-boarding

The first thing I needed to do was develop the characters, which involves lots of practice pencil drawings until the characters start to feel right. I had to research Asian faces – particularly eyes – to make sure I have this at least close to right. Obviously, Ling Li was the most important, and I drew her over and over again until I felt I knew what she looked like. The images then get copied and pasted all over my study walls so I can be reminded as I work on the next steps.



Next, I created a story-board. The story-board is an essential part of the process. Until that is done, the story is just a series of lines of text on a page. But it's my job to decide how that text flows throughout the book. I need to determine what illustrations are required to work with the text, where the page-turns need to be. But the story-board also starts to set the style of the illustrations – what is a distant shot, what is a close-up etc. I reviewed this with the author and editor to get their take on it as well.





Ling Li came across a raggedly dressed magician doing tricks.

At the end of the magician's performance, the few people who were watching walked away without leaving any money.

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Ling Li decided it was only fair to pay money as the magician had entertained her. She was generous as she dropped some coins into his bowl.

The magician bowed and said thank you.

19



The final rays of the sun fanned the sky as evening began to fall. As she walked past the last few stalls at the market, she heard a man calling out, "Lanterns for sale."

Ling Li stopped and asked, "How much for a lantern?"  
"Just three coins."  
"I only have two."

The lantern seller had seen how generous Ling Li had been to the old lady.  
"The last sale of the day brings good luck. For you, a special, just two coins."

"Could I have one please?" Ling Li asked.

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#### 4. Set-up and final illustrations

While I knew I wanted to re-create a Qing brush and ink style painting, I also wanted to work digitally. I have always moved between traditional and digital media. I had lots of ideas of what I wanted to do, but I also had to be realistic – I had a deadline and a very detailed book to produce. I needed to find a method that suited this and working directly into digital provided this.

## Ling Li's Lantern – Teaching Notes

I use a Wacom Cintiq tablet, which is an interactive pen display – it means I use a digital pen and can “paint” directly onto the screen. This is a fantastic machine and a great way to work. I used Adobe Photoshop to create the illustrations, usually working straight over the top of the story-board setups. I found a digital brush setting that replicated the “Qing” brush style I was looking for.



Test image – actual brush and acrylic



Final image - Wacom tablet digital illustration

But I had another trick up my sleeve. I used my architecture skills to create a CAD model of the main pagodas that are such a feature of the story. This allowed me to create complex perspective drawings accurately without detailed set-up, and this saved me hours.

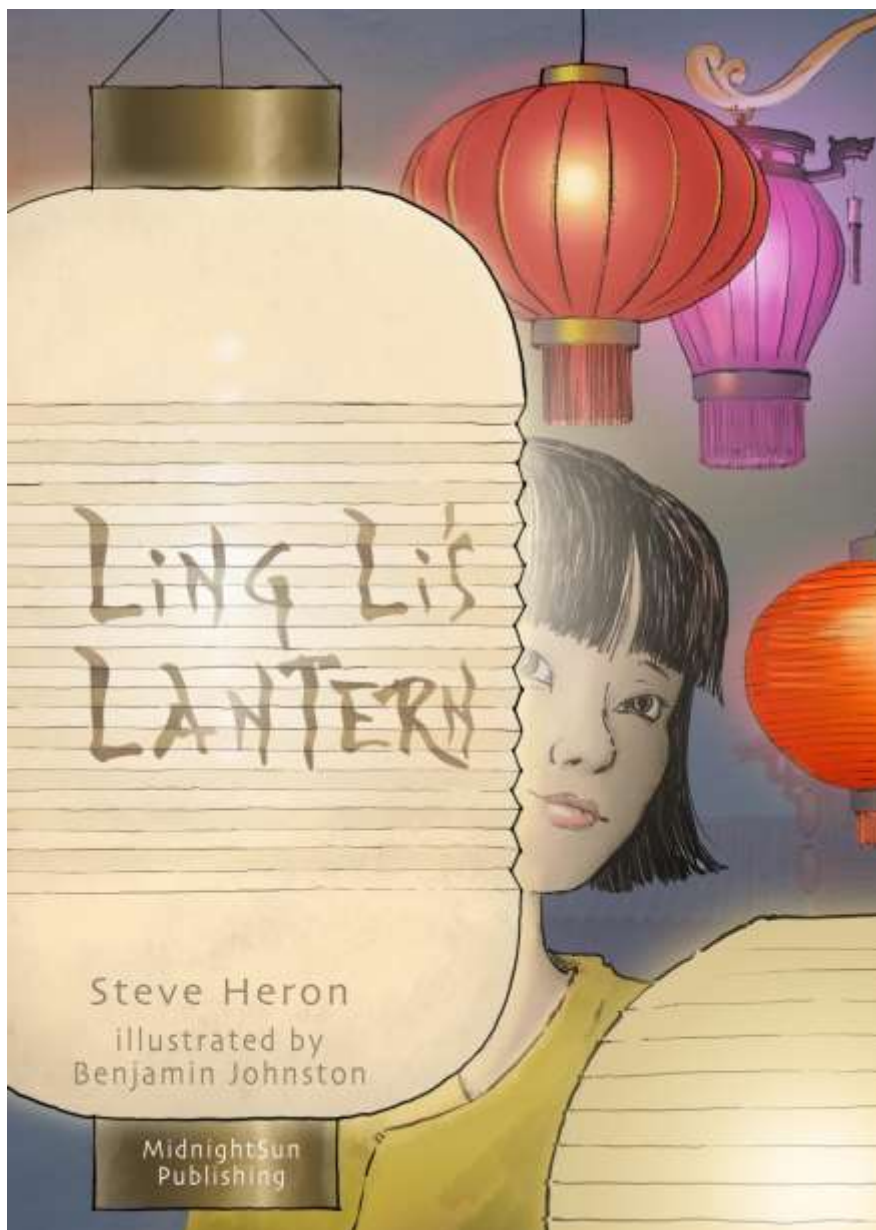


One of the main reasons I wanted to produce the work digitally was I knew that light was an essential part of the story. The main story starts in the day but moved into the evening, and the lantern light play was going to be important. This was not something I felt I could do justice in traditional media.

Digital illustration also allows you to copy sections for re-use later. The street scene in the village, for example, was re-used throughout the book.

## 5. End result

I'm delighted with the result and very thankful to have been given the opportunity to illustrate this wonderful story. I hope I have captured the feel of China of the right period authentically.



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