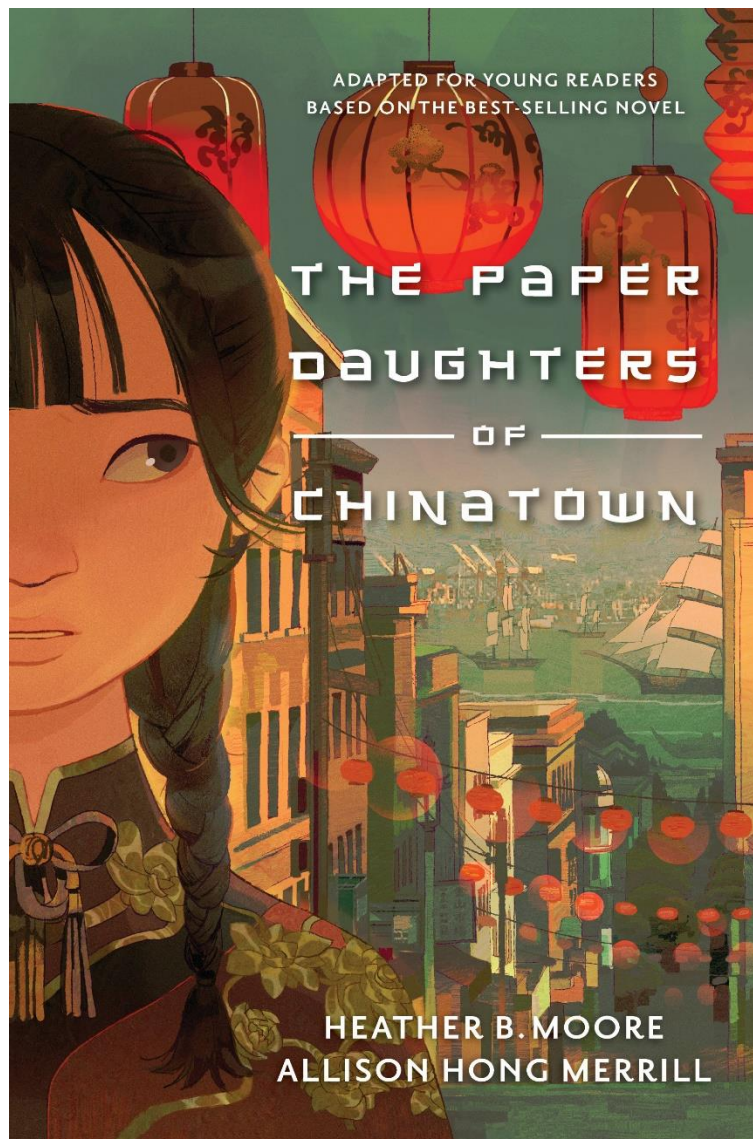


# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## *The Paper Daughters of Chinatown*

Adapted for Young Readers

By Heather B. Moore and Allison Hong Merrill



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## PLOT SUMMARY

**Based on the true story of two friends who unite to help rescue immigrant women in the most dangerous corners of San Francisco's Chinatown in the late 1890s.**

When Tai Choi leaves her home in the Zhejiang province of China, she believes she'll be visiting her grandmother. But in truth, despite her mother's opposition, her father has sold her to pay his gambling debts. Alone and afraid, Tai Choi is put on a ship headed for San Francisco, known among the Chinese as Gold Mountain. When she arrives, she is forced to go by the new name on her immigration documents: Tien Fu Wu.

Her new life as a servant at a gambling den is hard. She is told to stay hidden, to stay silent, and to perform an endless list of chores, or she will be punished. Tien Fu thinks her life couldn't get any worse, until she is sold again to an abusive shopkeeper and tasked to care for a young boy. If she is to survive, Tien Fu must persevere and learn who to trust.

When Dolly Cameron arrives in San Francisco to teach sewing at a mission home for orphaned Asian girls, she meets Tien Fu, a willful, defiant child, unwilling to trust anyone. Dolly quickly learns that all the girls at the home were rescued from servitude and maltreatment. She immediately joins some women on the staff and dedicates her life to helping these "paper daughters" because some in authority have turned a blind eye to the situation.

Despite many challenges, Dolly and Tien Fu forge a powerful friendship as they work to win the freedom of thousands of immigrant women and girls, mentor those in the mission home, and help them learn life skills to become self-sufficient.

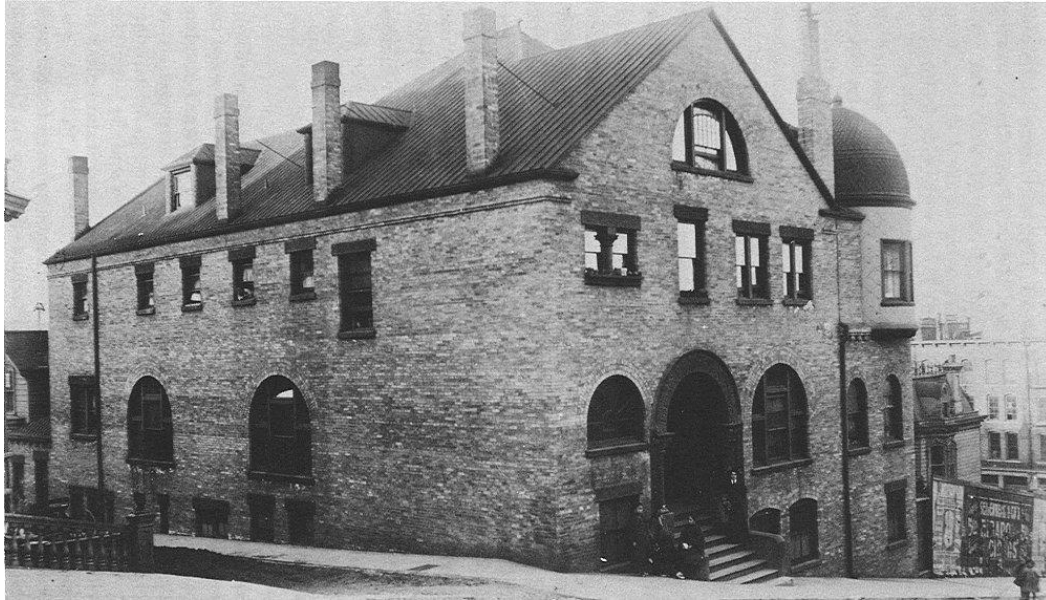


Tien Fu Wu



Tien Fu Wu and Dolly Cameron

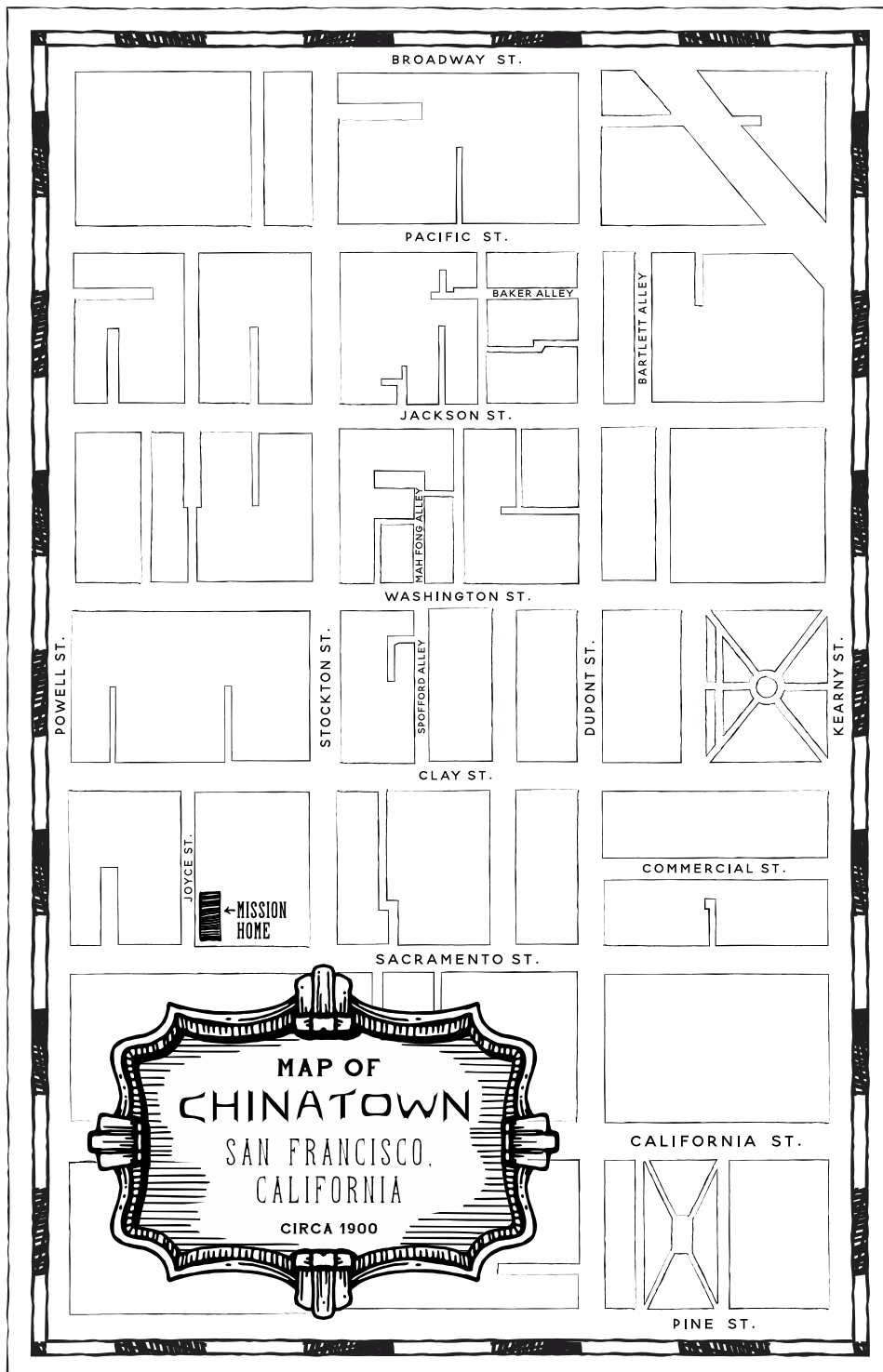




The Occidental Mission Home for Girls: 920 Sacramento Street, San Francisco, California



Mission Home rebuilt in 1908: now called Cameron House.



## TIMELINES

- 1869: Donaldina Cameron is born in Clydevale in Port Molyneux, New Zealand.
- 1872: The Cameron family moves to California, arriving in San Francisco.
- 1873: The California branch of the Women's Foreign Mission Society is formed.
- 1874: The Women's Foreign Mission Society opens the Occidental Mission Home for Girls.
- 1882: The Chinese Exclusion Act is approved by Congress.
- 1888: Tai Choi (Tien Fu Wu) is born in Zhejiang Province, China.
- 1894: The Occidental Mission Home for Girls relocates to 920 Sacramento Street.
- 1894: Tien Fu Wu is rescued and brought to the mission home.
- 1895: Donaldina Cameron takes the train to San Francisco in April and arrives at the mission home.
- 1897: The mission home superintendent Margaret Culbertson dies. Mary H. Field becomes the new superintendent.
- 1900: Mary H. Field resigns, and Donaldina Cameron accepts the position as superintendent.
- 1901: Chinatown is scoured because of bubonic plague.
- 1906: An enormous earthquake devastates San Francisco.
- 1907: The cornerstone for a new building is laid at 920 Sacramento Street.
- 1908: Miss Cameron and the girls return to 920 Sacramento Street, and the newly built mission home is dedicated.
- 1907–1911: Tien Fu Wu attends college in Pennsylvania and Canada.
- 1910: The Angel Island Immigration Station opens.
- 1912: Women are allowed to vote in San Francisco.
- 1934: Donaldina Cameron retires.
- 1935: Trafficked women testify in the Broken Blossoms court case.
- 1942: The mission home is renamed the "Cameron House."
- 1943: The Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed.
- 1968: Donaldina Cameron dies with Tien Fu Wu by her side.

## READER QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### **Q: Did Tien Fu Wu ever go to college?**

Yes, she attended college in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and then went to the Bible Training School in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Horace C. Coleman sponsored her education, paying for all six years of her schooling. Tien Fu kept her promise to Dolly and returned to the mission home, playing an integral role in guiding the work forward (see Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 153).

### **Q: Did Tien Fu Wu ever get a chance to go home?**

**A:** Twenty-four years after her father had sold her to pay his gambling debts, Tien Fu kept the promise she'd made to her mother and returned to China in the fall of 1916. Unfortunately, Tien Fu's search for her family in the Zhejiang province was unsuccessful. "I never found any of them. I couldn't find the place," she told a historian many years later (Interview with Tien Fu Wu, by Him Mark Lai, 1971).

For over two decades, while she was in America, there had been a political revolution, uprisings, and foreign powers' attacks and colonization in China. It's possible that Tien Fu's family had been forced to leave their war-torn hometown as countless others had during those riotous times.

Without any blood ties to her motherland, Tien Fu returned to San Francisco to the only home she knew and to Miss Cameron, her new mother who had helped raise her.

### **Q: What happened to Dolly Cameron after this story?**

Dolly took a year-long furlough after working at the mission home for nine years, four of them as the director. She traveled across the United States, visiting former residents of the home, visited her sister Isabella for the first time in Scotland, then finally visited China (see Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 74–76, 88–95).

When Tien Fu returned from college, she worked side-by-side with Dolly for the next few decades. Dolly retired in 1934. The record books in the mission home show that Dolly and her staff aided three thousand enslaved girls and women.

### **Q: Who was Kum Quai?**

Kum Quai was a real person, although meeting Tien Fu in China is a fictional aspect of the story. There is some discrepancy in the accounts of how Kum Quai arrived at 920 Sacramento Street. Author Carol Wilson said that she came of her own accord, escaped from her master (see *Chinatown Quest*, 19), and author Mildred Martin, who called her Kum Qui, said that she was rescued from Baker Alley and rushed to the mission home through a heckling crowd (see *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 55).

When Kum Quai was abducted from the mission home in March 1900, Dolly Cameron would not back down. These events led to the fiasco of Kum Quai and Dolly spending the night in jail, only to have Kum Quai abducted again, and tried in the middle of the night on the roadside. Public upheaval led to indictments of the justice of the peace, the deputy constable, and the two Chinese abductors Chung Bow



and Wong Fong (see Wilson, *Chinatown Quest*, 19–25; see also Martin, *Chinatown's Angry Angel*, 55–57).

**Q: Why didn't Tien Fu Wu go back to using her birth name?**

**A:** We don't have any records in Tien Fu's own words that tell us about her names. Author Allison Hong Merrill took the liberty of fictionalizing the scenario that she was given the name Tai Choi at birth and then was given the new name Tien Fu Wu when she was six. She was illiterate in both Chinese and English when she was on the way to America. She wouldn't have known how to tell anyone the Chinese characters for her name. Since the highbinder already had fake documents for her with the name Tien Fu Wu (伍天福), it was easier for her to go by that new identity. In San Francisco, not many people knew her as Tai Choi. In both a literal and a metaphorical sense, she couldn't go back to being Tai Choi anymore, so she became Tien Fu Wu for the rest of her life. But more than anything else, she became the strong, inspiring, and empowering woman she was born to be.

**Q: Why were so many Chinese immigrating to America in the 1800s?**

**A:** After the British defeated China in the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), 2.5 million Chinese traveled overseas in the latter half of the nineteenth century to find jobs. Due to increased taxes, the impossibility of competing against imported goods, loss of land, overpopulation, and other calamities, including devastation from rebellions and uprisings, many Chinese turned to working in the gold mines in California or the railroads in the western United States as a way to feed a destitute people.

**Q: Why were Chinese girls and women trafficked to America?**

**A:** The conditions of labor camps in America were harsh, and nicer accommodations were too expensive, so Chinese men mostly immigrated alone. Those who were married sent money home to their families. In the 1850s, Chinese women made up less than five percent of the total Chinese population in America. Traditional Chinese women remained at home, caring for the household and children, as well as aging parents, in order to adhere to the Confucian teaching: “A woman's duty is to care for the household, and she should have no desire to go abroad” (Yung, *Unbound Feet*, 20). This meant that most Chinese men arrived in America without their wives, creating a void in which women were not part of the fiber of the Chinatown culture in San Francisco. Organizations such as the tong formed to provide women for the men in the form of paid prostitution.

This played into the patriarchal culture of the Chinese, in which marriages were arranged and women “had no right to divorce or remarry” while men were “permitted to commit adultery, divorce, remarry, practice polygyny, and discipline their spouses as they saw fit” (Yung, 19).

**Q: What is the Chinese Exclusion Act, and how did Chinese girls and women coming into America get past the anti-immigration laws?**

**A:** Chinese women were up against anti-immigration laws from both sides of the Pacific Ocean. Chinese law forbade the emigration of women until 1911, and the 1852 Foreign Miners' Tax affected Chinese miners, along with taxes “levied on Chinese fishermen, laundry men, and brothel owners” (Yung, 21), making it even more expensive to support a family. Besides passing punitive ordinances aimed specifically at the Chinese, the California legislature denied them basic civil rights, including immigration

rights, employment in public works, intermarriage with whites, ability to give testimony in court, and the right to own land.

Then came the Page Act of 1875, which prohibited the entry of a woman who was from “China, Japan, or any Oriental country” coming into America for “immoral purposes” (see <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/page-act/>). This was followed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, in which the United States Congress suspended Chinese laborers from immigrating for ten years. The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed in 1892, then again in 1904 and so on, until it was finally repealed in 1943, making this law stay in effect for sixty-one years.

**Q: How did Chinese girls and women get trafficked into America, then?**

**A:** “In the interest of diplomatic and trade relations between China and the United States, Chinese officials, students, teachers, merchants, and travelers were exempted by treaty provisions—and therein lay the loophole through which Chinese, including women, were able to continue coming after 1882” (Yung, 22).

These exemptions were the open door that allowed slave owners or members of the criminal tong to bring Chinese women into the country under false identities supported by forged paperwork. By virtue of this forged paperwork system, in which the Chinese woman would memorize her new family’s heritage and claim to be married or otherwise related to a Chinese man already living and working in California, the *paper daughter* was allowed into the country. “Upon arrival in San Francisco many such Chinese women, usually between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, were taken to a barracoon, where they were either turned over to their owners or stripped for inspection and sold to the highest bidder” (Yung, 27).

**Q: Why was the Occidental Mission Home for Girls founded?**

**A:** It wasn’t until the early 1870s that women’s missionary societies discovered the need to provide a safe place for Chinese women fleeing slavery. Despite facing opposition herself for helping the Chinese women, Mrs. Samantha Condit, wife of a Presbyterian missionary assigned to Chinatown, advocated for their cause until she established the California branch of the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society. Not only was she up against a myriad of anti-Chinese city ordinances, but finding donors proved to be difficult, with many refusing to donate to a cause that supported “depraved women” (*New Era Magazine* 1920, 137).

Condit prevailed. In 1874, she and her board rented a small apartment just below Nob Hill in San Francisco, officially founding the Occidental Mission Home for Girls. This was the beginning of establishing a place of refuge, healing, education, and Christian religious instruction for the destitute women of Chinatown. Although Bible study and attending church on Sundays were part of the curriculum at the Mission Home, Dolly Cameron and her staff incorporated the girls’ heritage and culture as well throughout their education. The Mission Home didn’t necessarily expect their girls to convert to Christianity, but some of them did (see Martin, *Chinatown’s Angry Angel*, 153). By the time Dolly Cameron retired as the mission home’s superintendent in 1934, the number of slaves she and Tien Fu Wu rescued had reached three thousand.

**Q: Is the Mission Home still in San Francisco today?**

**A:** Yes, the Occidental Mission Home for Girls was renamed Cameron House in honor of Dolly Cameron. You can find out more about their current programs online: <https://cameronhouse.org/>. From their website: “Cameron House serves the needs of low-income and immigrant Asian youth and families in San Francisco. Thanks to thousands of faithful volunteers, devoted staff, committed Board members, and enthusiastic supporters like you, Cameron House provides a wide variety of programs to Asian youth and families. As part of Donaldina’s heritage, we are proud to offer services like: counseling; domestic violence intervention; food distribution; adult ESL and computer classes; support groups; youth afterschool and summer programs; sports, arts, and camping experiences; leadership development; and volunteer opportunities. Today we serve over 1,000 low-income immigrant children and families.”

**Q: What are the differences between the original book, *The Paper Daughters of Chinatown*, and the Young Reader’s Edition?**

**A:** The original version focuses on Dolly Cameron’s personal journey and career. The secondary character is Mei Lien, who is fictional, but her journey follows stories of the Chinese women who were forced into brothels. Part of the story reveals the darker side of human trafficking. Dolly and her staff members go on multiple rescues to retrieve Chinese girls from brothels. Tien Fu Wu appears in the book as well, but her story is not central to the plot.

In the Young Reader’s Edition, Tien Fu Wu is the main character, starting out at six years old. The reader follows her journey as a young girl forced to work as a domestic slave. Dolly Cameron is a secondary character. Although hints are given about the dangerous situations some of the residents of the Mission Home were forced to live in, there aren’t any graphic or harsh details. The focus of this version is how Tien Fu overcomes her struggles, uses what she learns to help others, and realizes that she can trust and love again.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think Tai Choi was affected when she found out her father had sold her?
2. How do you imagine Tai Choi felt when she was forced to take on a fake name—Tien Fu Wu, and lied about her identity?
3. When Tien Fu Wu arrived in a new country where she had no family and friends, and didn't understand the language, what emotions do you think she went through?
4. Why do you think Dolly Cameron decided to stay and work at the Mission Home after her one-year teaching contract was over?
5. Why did it take Tien Fu so long to trust Dolly Cameron and the other staff members at the Mission Home?
6. What are some things Tien Fu learned about herself when going through difficult challenges?
7. Do you think the Stanford University students did the right thing by protesting Kum Quai's arrest? Or should they have let the authorities handle the situation?
8. How important was Tien Fu's work? What if Dolly Cameron never had an interpreter? How did that change things?
9. Dolly Cameron never got married. How do you think she felt whenever she hosted wedding receptions in the Mission Home for the rescued women?
10. Both Dolly Cameron and Tien Fu Wu were immigrants who devoted their lives to serve the people in their adopted country, America. How does their story make you think about immigrants?

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- National Human Trafficking Hotline and Information: <https://humantraffickinghotline.org/en>.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Heather B. Moore is a *USA Today* bestseller and award-winning author of more than seventy publications. She's lived on both the east and west coasts of the United States, including Hawaii, and attended school abroad, including the Cairo American College in Egypt, and the Anglican School of Jerusalem in Israel. She loves to learn about anything in history and, as an author, is passionate about historical research.



Allison Hong Merrill was born and raised in Taiwan and came to the United States at twenty-two as a university student. She holds an MFA in writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts and writes both fiction and creative nonfiction in both Chinese and English. Her work has won both national and international literary awards.