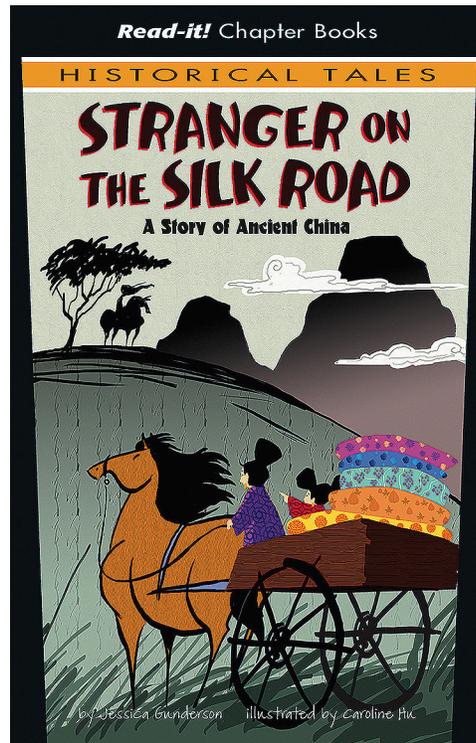




READER'S THEATER



The Stranger on the Silk Road **A Story of Ancient China** **by Jessica Gunderson**

Characters: **Narrator**
Sun
Ki
Stranger

Genre: **Historical Fiction**

Ages: **7-10**

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Introduction: 167 B.C.—Han Dynasty

Narrator: One day, Sun and Ki were traveling along the Silk Road to the village. They rode in a horse-drawn cart piled high with silk for their father to trade.

Ki: My feet hurt.

Sun: When I had my feet bound, I did not cry as much as you. In order to be beautiful, you must bind your feet. Remember that, and the pain will go away.

Narrator: In ancient China, little girls wrapped their feet to keep them from growing big and ugly. Small feet were considered beautiful. Only the very rich bound their feet. Sun's feet were very tiny. Her family was wealthy, but her parents wanted her to marry into even greater wealth.

Ki: Will my feet ever stop hurting, Sun?

Sun: Yes. When you are six years old.

Ki: But that is a year away!

Sun: A year will go fast. In a few years, I will have to go live with a husband and his parents. I will have to say good-bye to you.

Narrator: Ki sniffled sadly.

Sun: Look! I can see the village.

Narrator: Sun and Ki stopped at the edge of the road to let their horses rest. Farmers hurried past, on their way to the village to sell their goods along the Silk Road. China was the only place where silk was made. Silk making was a Chinese secret.

Suddenly, a man on a horse appeared at the top of the hill. His hair was in a ponytail at the top of his head, the way Chinese men wore it, but there was something strange about his eyes.

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Sun: We are going to the village to trade our silk. My father is a silk merchant.

Narrator: The stranger leaned forward with a greedy gleam in his eyes. Ki clutched Sun's hand nervously.

Stranger: May I please look at your silk?

Sun: My family makes the best silk in the land.

Narrator: The stranger studied the fabric in his hands. Meanwhile, Sun studied his hair. It was coarse and dull, not shiny like hers.

Sun: My father is wealthy. But when he was a boy, he had to work in the silk fields.

Stranger: Where are the fields?

Narrator: The stranger held his hair, which had flopped forward onto his forehead in the wind.

Sun: Over there. My father made my sister and me learn to make silk, too.

Narrator: Ki pulled on Sun's arm impatiently.

Stranger: You know how to make silk?

Sun: Yes, but it's not very exciting. I would rather tell you all about my new slippers —

Narrator: Ki tugged on Sun's arm again, this time so hard she almost ripped the sleeve. But Sun kept talking.

Stranger: Where do you find the silk threads?

Sun: First, you have to have mulberry trees — lots of them. Mulberry leaves are the only thing silkworms will eat.

Stranger: The silkworm! There is a worm that makes silk?

Narrator: Sun sighed impatiently. Didn't this man know anything? She thought everyone in China knew how to make silk!

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Sun: Yes. The worm spins its cocoon with soft threads. Then you dip the cocoon in hot water to get rid of the stickiness.

Stranger: I see. Then you pull apart the cocoon and use the threads?

Narrator: Sun watched the stranger. There was something strange about his eyes and his hair. Ki kicked Sun, but her feet were so sore it hurt her worse than Sun. Tears flooded Ki's eyes.

Sun: Ki is crying about her feet. When I was a little girl—

Stranger: And how do you turn the threads into silk?

Narrator: The stranger's horse pawed the ground. There was something strange about the horse too. But what was it?

Sun: We spin the small threads into thick threads. Then we dye the threads different colors and weave them together to make fabric.

Stranger: And the worms? Are they crawling about in the fields?

Narrator: But the stranger didn't wait for Sun's answer. He didn't even bow like a Chinese gentleman should. Instead, he hopped onto his horse and waved one hand as he galloped away. As the stranger and his horse disappeared, Sun realized what was so strange about the horse . . . it had no tail.

What did the stranger really want? Did Sun give away an important secret? To find out, read *Stranger on the Silk Road*, a *Read-It!* Historical Tale from Picture Window Books.