

## **The Dalai Lama Story by Andrew Crowe (Longacre Press)**

Teacher Notes by Raymond Huber

### **Before Reading**

The name 'Dalai Lama' is one of the most famous, most recognised names in the world – as iconic as Nelson Mandela or Gandhi. What do you think of when you hear the name? What words come to mind? What kind of person do you imagine him to be?

What kind of icon (symbol) is he?

What do you know about his life?

The subtitle of the book is 'The Making of a World Leader' – why do you think he is considered an international leader?

### **Read the Foreword**

What impression of the man do his words give you?

What issue is he most concerned about?

What do you know about Tibet's recent history?

### **Character Study**

What were the signs that Lhamo was special as a child? p.22

Describe Lhamo's personality as a very young child: Chapter 7

Chapter 8: What effect might this special treatment and attention have on a 4 year old?

Describe Kundun's personality as he grew up. Give examples of his strong will and ego-centric behaviour. Pp 49-52, 57,58

Describe life for a child in the world's largest castle. (Chapter 10). Why was it 'a golden prison'?

What was it like for Lobsang, being brother to the Dalai Lama?

How does Kundun change as a teenager? (Chapter 13). What values does he develop? What are his interests? (p74-76).

What do Kundun's questions on page 81 reveal about himself and Tibet?

Who is the Dalai Lama according to Kundun? What does the name mean? (p. 83/84).

What incredible challenges and threats did Kundun face at age 15? (Chapter 16)

What could Kundun have done to prevent a massacre? (Chapter 22)

What was he feeling at this turning point in his life? (Chapter 25)

What do the Dalai Lama's childhood stories tell you about him as a person? p. 163

How does his attitude towards the Chinese help him? (p.164)

'Big mind; big heart'. What does his philosophy mean to you (p.165).

### **Inspiring Leaders**

What other world leader suffered years of exile (in a South African prison) but still forgave his enemies?

Can you think of other world leaders that activity promoting the idea of 'loving your enemy.'

Research the non-violence ideals of Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

'Compassion wins me friends; force does not' Why is this an important lesson for a leader to learn?

Why do Tibetans 'cross half of Tibet on foot to see the Dalai Lama? 'Many prostrating full length on the ground between each step'. Try walking like this. See also p.170

Who are the people (famous or not) that inspire you or encourage you in life?

Write a short description of the person.

### **Spiritual Beliefs**

Describe what belief in reincarnation means for a person. p.15/17

What process did they follow in seeking the new Dalai Lama? (Chapter 2/3).

What does this tell you about the Tibetan's spiritual beliefs?

Describe the Tibetan people's belief system (p.19/20) relating to nature, farming, curses, fortune and children.

How significant was religion in the lives of Tibetan children? p.33

Tibetans had 'State Astrologers' (p.45). What does this tell you about Tibetan religion and politics? How were important decisions influenced by the 'State Oracle'? (see chapter 16).

Who are some other great 'spiritual leaders' in the world? Were they special as children? Were they chosen in this manner? Has NZ a spiritual leader? What is your impression of Buddhist ideas (p.73) about happiness, misery and emotions such as anger? What is the 'science of happiness'? In your own life?

What is the Buddhist attitude to enemies?

Why was religion 'repugnant' to the Communists? (Chapter 29). Is it possible to stamp out belief by destroying material things; and terrorizing people? What effect does persecution have on believers?

Signs in nature, omens and prophecy played an important part in Tibet. (p.86). Why? Were they accurate? Do we have similar beliefs in signs, or do we consider them superstitions?

### **Deeper Thinking**

Do you agree with Kundun's non-violence response to the terror? (p.115). Debate the issue.

Why is Buddha's 'love your enemy' statement so difficult? (p.116). Jesus had a similar teaching. Debate the pros and cons of this ideal.

'Violence ultimately leads to the betrayal of even the noblest cause'. Explain why this is so. Is violence ever justified?

'I ask only that you not use violence, except in defence.' (p.143). How is this 'defence' argument used to justify wars, such as WW2. Do you think that fighting can be acceptable sometimes? Imagine your response to an attack on New Zealand.

What would be the reaction if this massacre happened today? (Chapter 26) What happened in Rwanda recently?

'No matter what governments do, the human spirit will always prevail.'

Considering the current wars in the world– do you agree with this statement?

Why or why not?

How much of the writing in this book is reporting of facts, and how much seems to be fictionalised. Is it possible to tell if details are accurate? For example, the thoughts of Diki on page 47? Or the 'supernatural' events? What sources did Crowe use?

## **Exploring Language**

### **1. Sayings:**

'A wolf who's accustomed to eating horses will never be satisfied eating sheep.'

What exactly does this saying mean, relating to people? (p. 34)

'You will become like water being poured into water'. What could this mean?

"Our thoughts are the colour, and only seem like the mind." This idea was strange to Heinrich. What does it mean to you? (p.83).

'A web had been spun around Tibet; now the spider was closing in.' Explain how this saying describes the Chinese strategy.

What does the Dalai Lama mean by the 'distinction between the actor and the action'?

### **2. Propaganda:**

Define propaganda.

'We shall liberate Tibet...The peaceful liberation of Tibet has begun.' (p.87).

What did these words really mean?

How was the truth twisted in the Chinese statement on page 100. Is this propaganda? Why or why not?

Would you trust Mao's statement on page 101?

Read the Chinese officials' statement on page 158 (beginning with the words 'The Tibetan people ardently love...'). Does this fit your definition of propaganda?

'Our flag' boasted Beijing Radio, 'symbol of light and happiness'. What was the reality for Tibetans? p.146.

## **Written Responses**

Report writing: Yaks (p.38): write a report on these animals– their uses, biology, habitat, adaptations.

A Day in the Life (p.176): List your own typical day using the same time line.

What do you think of the Dalai Lama's day?

Chapter 24; Escape by night- write a first person account of the night.

Read pages 79-81. Then read Heinrich Harrer's version of his first meeting with Kundun, in chapter 15 of his book **Seven Years in Tibet**. Which version do you prefer? Why? Comment on Crowe's use of dialogue to bring the scene to life.

Watch the movie '**Seven Years in Tibet**'. Compare the Hollywood version with the facts as presented by Crowe's book.

Watch the movie **Kundun** (1997). How accurate is it? Review the movie.

Write a critical review of the book.

## **Visual Responses**

Illustrate the dream on page 19.

Why does the swastika symbol have such powerful associations? (p.51)

Why is the Bodhi tree important in Buddhism? (p.113) Paint a picture of the tree.

Create a picture of a windhorse. (p.114)

## **Tibetan Culture**

Describe the initiation (p.48). What other cultures have initiations?

Outline the Tibetan education methods.( p.72). Do we still use any of these teaching techniques today?

Explain Kundun's education and exam system. (p.117,119)

Tibet was once the ruler and aggressor. p 119. What role did the monks play in the past?

Research: Read the list on page 182 and choose a resource to research one aspect of Tibetan life.

Find out what life is like in Tibet today.

## **Comprehension Questions**

### Chapter 1

What does the 8<sup>th</sup> century prophecy (p.12) predict? What could these words mean: 'the iron bird', 'horses gallop on wheels', 'Dharma will leave', and 'the Red Man.'

How has the prediction come 'true' for Tibet in recent history?

Why can't Andrew speak freely? p.13

What did the Chinese government think of the Dalai Lama? p.13/14

Did the 13th Dalai Lama's predictions come 'true'? p.15 Why do you think his head turned north-east? (see map p.9)

### Chapter 3

How did people survive /live in this environment? p.21

### Chapter 4

How did they search for the child?

### Chapter 5

What were the signs this was the child? p.28- 30

How were the Chinese a problem, even back in the 1930s?

### Chapter 6

How did Kewtsang try and protect the boy? p.32

What was the General' plan with the hostage and ransom? Was it working?

### Chapter 7

p.35, 36- what were the hazards in travelling in Tibet in 1939? Has it changed much since then?

Why did people come for a blessing? p.38

Why had they kept the child's status a secret? p.40

### Chapter 8

It seemed he 'had known this man all his life' when he met the fortune-teller. (p. 46) How does this relate to reincarnation beliefs?

### Chapter 9

Why were there mice everywhere? p.49 (See also p.70 –the worms)

Chapter 11

Why was Tibet called a 'Forbidden Land'?

How did Harrer and Aufschnaiter survive the trek across Western Tibet?

Chapter 12

What do the market stalls reveal about Tibet's contact with the world? (p.69)

Chapter 14

Why was ice skating unknown in Lhasa?

Why did Harrer and Kundun get on so well?

What important details are revealed about the long relationship between China and Tibet? Pages 82, 83.

Chapter 16

Who did Kundun turn to for an opinion? p.89 Why?

Why did he free the convicts? p.91

What countries did he seek help from. Why those countries?

Chapter 17

What options did Kundun have now? List the pros and cons.

What economic changes did Kundun have in mind? p.94

Why did no other country want to help Tibet? p.98

What appealed to Kundun about Communism? p.99

Chapter 18

What was the Chinese strategy to take over Tibet? p102-103.

What was Kundun's response? p.104.

Chapter 19

What was Mao like? p.106,107

Was there freedom in China under Mao's reforms? p.107

Why did the Chinese use terror tactics? How should the people respond? Why did the Chinese leave Kundun alive?

Chapter 20

Why did Kundun return to Tibet, knowing the dangers? p.114

Chapter 23

Why did Kundun visualise reaching India? p.128

Chapter 25

What support did Kundun have from the people?

Chapter 26

Why were the Americans involved here? p.144

Chapter 28

Why was the world media so interested in the Dalai Lama? p 157

Why was he welcomed so warmly in India?

Chapter 29

What is Hong's reaction to the genocide in Tibet?

Can you explain Hong's attitude to death?

Chapter 30

What does anger do to you according to the Dalai Lama?

Why did he laugh about being a target? p.165

Chapter 31

What is the Great Firewall of China?

### **Afterword**

Why do Chinese suppress free speech? p.170. What do they fear?

What is revealed here about 'life in old Tibet'? Does this justify the Chinese invasion? What were the most likely motives for the invasion? ( p.172)

What limits are still on Tibet freedoms today? (p.172)