

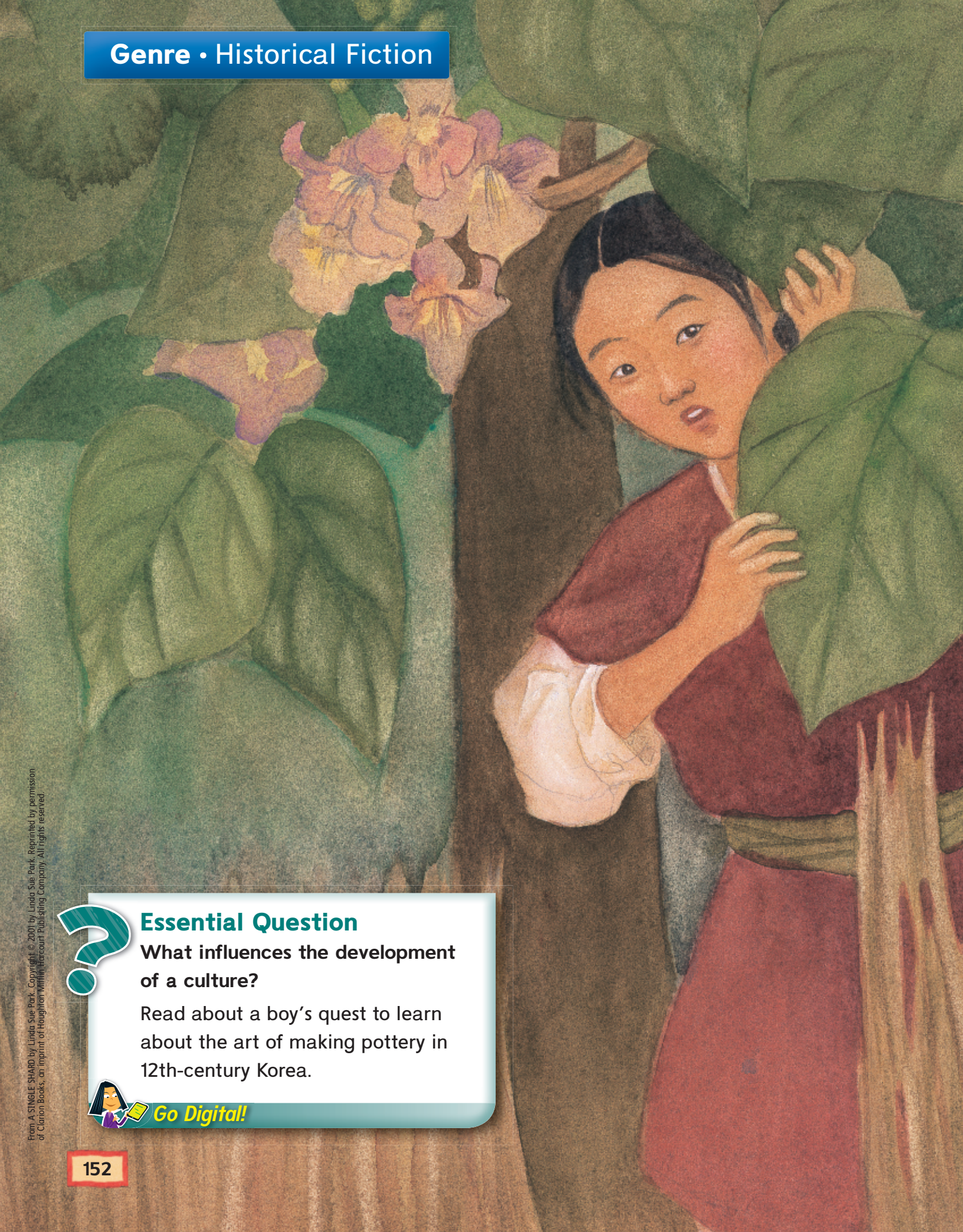
# Wonders



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### Essential Question

What influences the development of a culture?

Read about a boy's quest to learn about the art of making pottery in 12th-century Korea.



**Go Digital!**





# A Single Shard

by Linda Sue Park  
illustrated by Julie Kim

**K**orea is an ancient country located on a peninsula on the eastern edge of Asia. In the 1100s, Korea was a kingdom of farmers and nobles. However, it also had potters, people who made beautiful vases and other objects from clay.

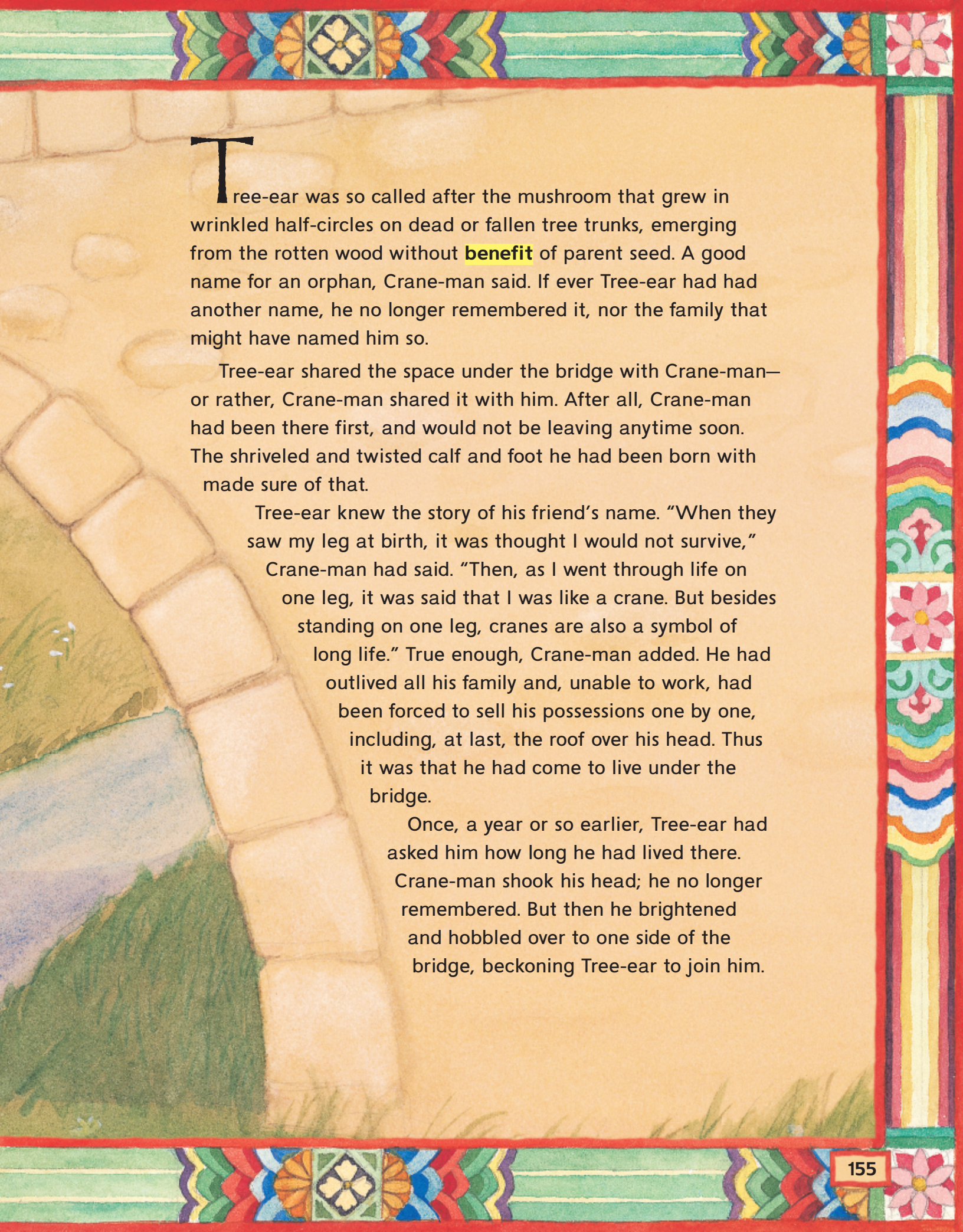
The potters were considered to be artists.

Tree-ear, the hero of this selection, has only one wish—to become a potter and make works of art from clay.









**T**ree-ear was so called after the mushroom that grew in wrinkled half-circles on dead or fallen tree trunks, emerging from the rotten wood without **benefit** of parent seed. A good name for an orphan, Crane-man said. If ever Tree-ear had had another name, he no longer remembered it, nor the family that might have named him so.

Tree-ear shared the space under the bridge with Crane-man—or rather, Crane-man shared it with him. After all, Crane-man had been there first, and would not be leaving anytime soon. The shriveled and twisted calf and foot he had been born with made sure of that.

Tree-ear knew the story of his friend's name. "When they saw my leg at birth, it was thought I would not survive," Crane-man had said. "Then, as I went through life on one leg, it was said that I was like a crane. But besides standing on one leg, cranes are also a symbol of long life." True enough, Crane-man added. He had outlived all his family and, unable to work, had been forced to sell his possessions one by one, including, at last, the roof over his head. Thus it was that he had come to live under the bridge.

Once, a year or so earlier, Tree-ear had asked him how long he had lived there. Crane-man shook his head; he no longer remembered. But then he brightened and hobbled over to one side of the bridge, beckoning Tree-ear to join him.



"I do not remember how long I have been here," he said, "but I know how long *you* have." And he pointed upward, to the underside of the bridge. "I wonder that I have not shown you this before."

On one of the slats was a series of deep scratches, as if made with a pointed stone. Tree-ear examined them, then shook his head at Crane-man. "So?"

"One mark for each spring since you came here," Crane-man explained. "I kept count of your years, for I thought the time would come when you would like to know how old you are."

Tree-ear looked again, this time with keen interest. There was a mark for each finger of both hands—ten marks in all.

Crane-man answered before Tree-ear asked. "No, you have more than ten years," he said. "When you first came and I began making those marks, you were in perhaps your second year—already on two legs and able to talk."

Tree-ear nodded. He knew the rest of the story already. Crane-man had learned but little from the man who had brought Tree-ear to the bridge. The man had been paid by a kindly monk in the city of Songdo to bring Tree-ear to the little seaside village of Ch'ulp'o. Tree-ear's parents had died of fever, and the monk knew of an uncle in Ch'ulp'o.

When the travelers arrived, the man discovered that the uncle no longer lived there, the house having been abandoned long before. He took Tree-ear to the temple on the mountainside, but the monks had been unable to take the boy in because fever raged there as well. The villagers told the man to take the child to the bridge, where Crane-man would care for him until the temple was free of sickness.



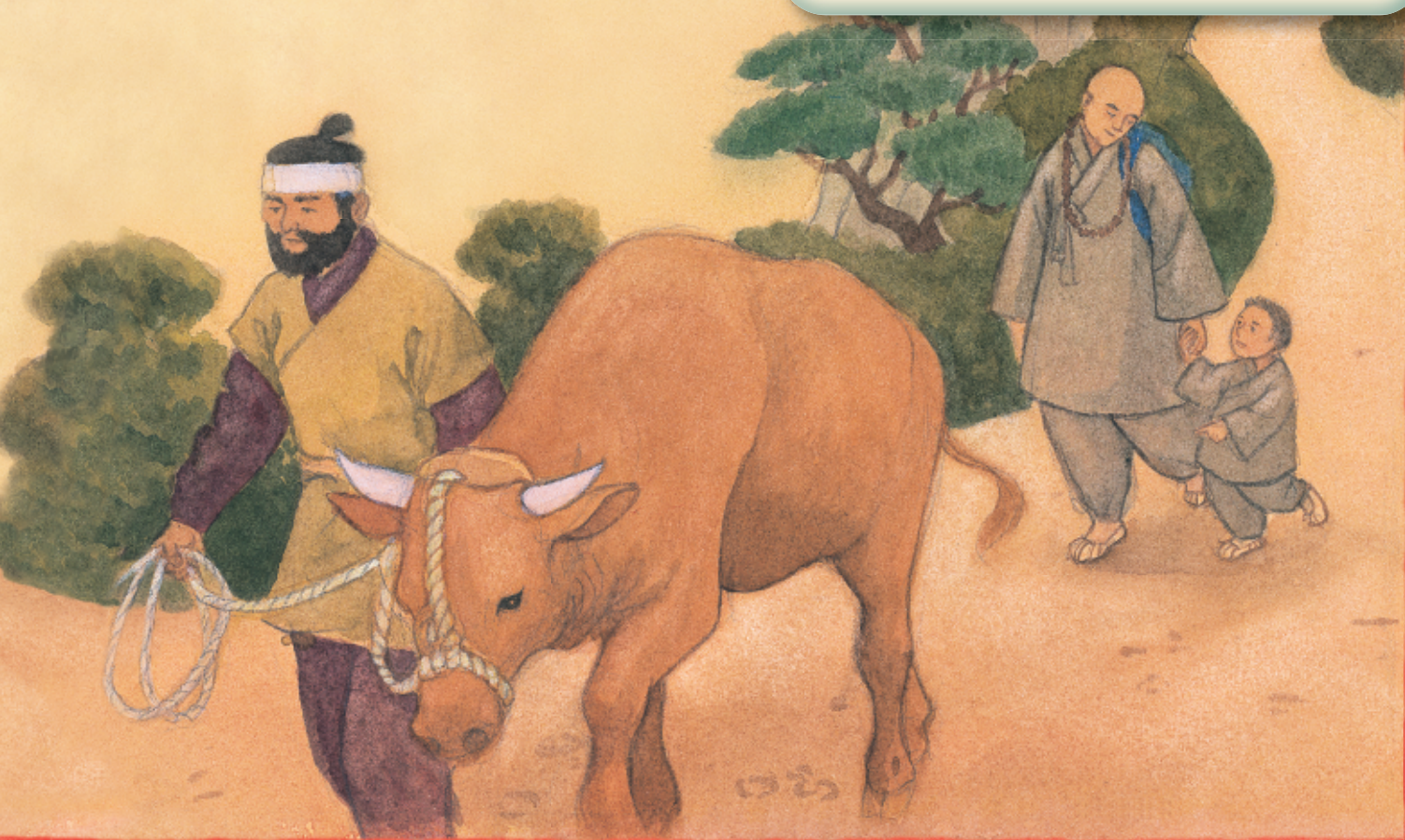


"And," Crane-man always said, "when a monk came to fetch you a few months later, you would not leave. You clung to my good leg like a monkey to a tree, not crying but not letting go, either! The monk went away. You stayed."

When Tree-ear was younger, he had asked for the story often, as if hearing it over and over again might reveal something more—what his father's trade had been, what his mother had looked like, where his uncle had gone—but there was never anything more. It no longer mattered. If there was more to having a home than Crane-man and the bridge, Tree-ear had neither knowledge nor need of it.

#### STOP AND CHECK

**Make Predictions** Do you think Tree-ear will one day try to find out what happened to his uncle? Cite evidence from the text to support your prediction.

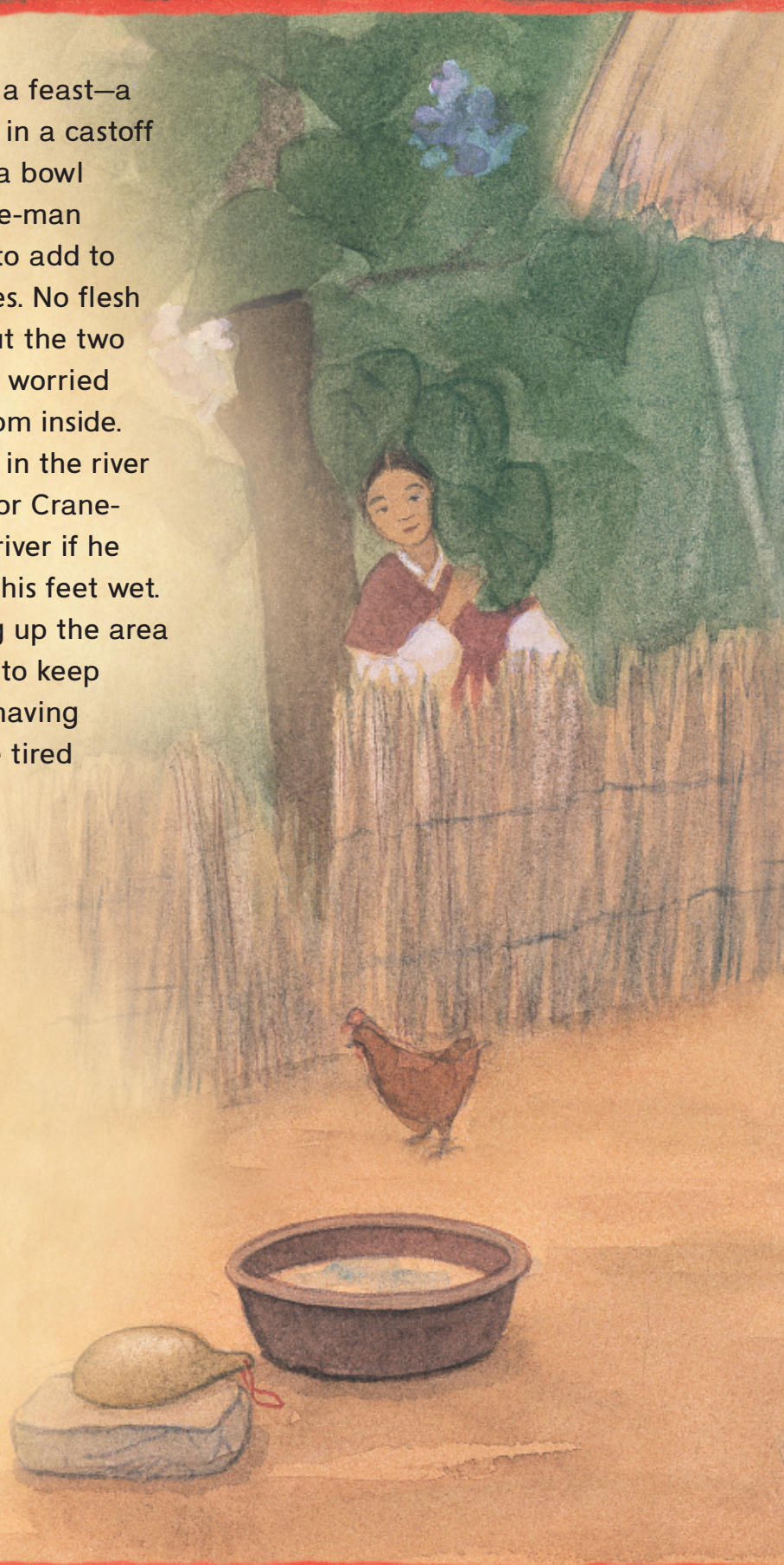





Breakfast that morning was a feast—a bit of the rice boiled to a gruel in a castoff earthenware pot, served up in a bowl carved from a gourd. And Crane-man produced yet another surprise to add to the meal: two chicken leg-bones. No flesh remained on the arid bones, but the two friends cracked them open and worried away every scrap of marrow from inside.

Afterward, Tree-ear washed in the river and fetched a gourd of water for Crane-man, who never went into the river if he could help it; he hated getting his feet wet. Then Tree-ear set about tidying up the area under the bridge. He took care to keep the place neat, for he disliked having to clear a space to sleep at the tired end of the day.

Housekeeping complete, Tree-ear left his companion and set off back up the road. This time he did not zigzag between rubbish heaps but strode purposefully toward a small house set apart from the others at a curve in the road.







Tree-ear slowed as he neared the mud-and-wood structure. He tilted his head, listening, and grinned when the droning syllables of a song-chant reached his ears. The master potter Min was singing, which meant that it was a “throwing” day.

Min’s house backed onto the beginnings of the foothills and their brushy growth, which gave way to pine-wooded mountains beyond. Tree-ear swung wide of the house. Under the deep eaves at the back, Min kept his potter’s wheel. He was there now, his gray head bent over the wheel, chanting his wordless song.

Tree-ear made his way cautiously to his favorite spot, behind a paulownia tree whose low branches kept him hidden from view. He peeped through the leaves and caught his breath in delight. Min was just beginning a new pot.

Min threw a mass of clay the size of a cabbage onto the center of the wheel. He picked it up and threw it again, threw it several times. After one last throw he sat down and stared at the clay for a moment. Using his foot to spin the base of the wheel, he placed dampened hands on the sluggardly lump, and for the hundredth time Tree-ear watched the miracle.

In only a few moments the clay rose and fell, grew taller, then rounded down, until it curved into perfect symmetry. The spinning slowed. The chant, too, died out and became a mutter of words that Tree-ear could not hear.



Min sat up straight. He crossed his arms and leaned back a little, as if to see the vase from a distance. Turning the wheel slowly with his knee, he inspected the graceful shape for invisible faults. Then, "Pah!" He shook his head and in a single motion of disgust scooped up the clay and slapped it back onto the wheel, whereupon it collapsed into an oafish lump again, as if ashamed.

Tree-ear opened his mouth to let out his breath silently, only then realizing that he had been keeping it back. To his eyes the vase had been perfect, its width half its height, its curves like those of a flower petal. Why, he wondered, had Min found it unworthy? What had he seen that so displeased him?




Min never failed to reject his first attempt. Then he would repeat the whole process. This day Tree-ear was able to watch the clay rise and fall four times before Min was satisfied. Each of the four efforts had looked identical to Tree-ear, but something about the fourth pleased Min. He took a length of twine and slipped it **deftly** under the vase to release it from the wheel, then placed the vase carefully on a tray to dry.

As Tree-ear crept away, he counted the days on his fingers. He knew the potter's routine well; it would be many days before another throwing day.

The village of Ch'ulp'o faced the sea, its back to the mountains and the river edging it like a neat seam. Its potters produced the delicate celadon ware that had achieved fame not only in Korea but as far away as the court of the Chinese emperor.





Ch'ulp'o had become an important village for ceramics by virtue of both its location and its soil. On the shore of the Western Sea, it had access both to the easiest sea route northward and to plentiful trade with China. And the clay from the village pits contained exactly the right amount of iron to produce the exquisite gray-green color of celadon so prized by collectors.

Tree-ear knew every potter in the village, but until recently he had known them only for their rubbish heaps. It was hard for him to believe that he had never taken the time to watch them at work before. In recent years the pottery from the village kilns had gained great favor among those wealthy enough to buy pieces as gifts for both the royal court and the Buddhist temples, and the potters had achieved new levels of prosperity. The pickings from their rubbish heaps had become richer in consequence, and for the first time Tree-ear was able to forget about his stomach for a few hours each day.

During those hours it was Min he chose to watch most closely. The other potters kept their wheels in small windowless shacks. But in the warm months Min preferred to work beneath the eaves behind his house, open to the breeze and the view of the mountains.

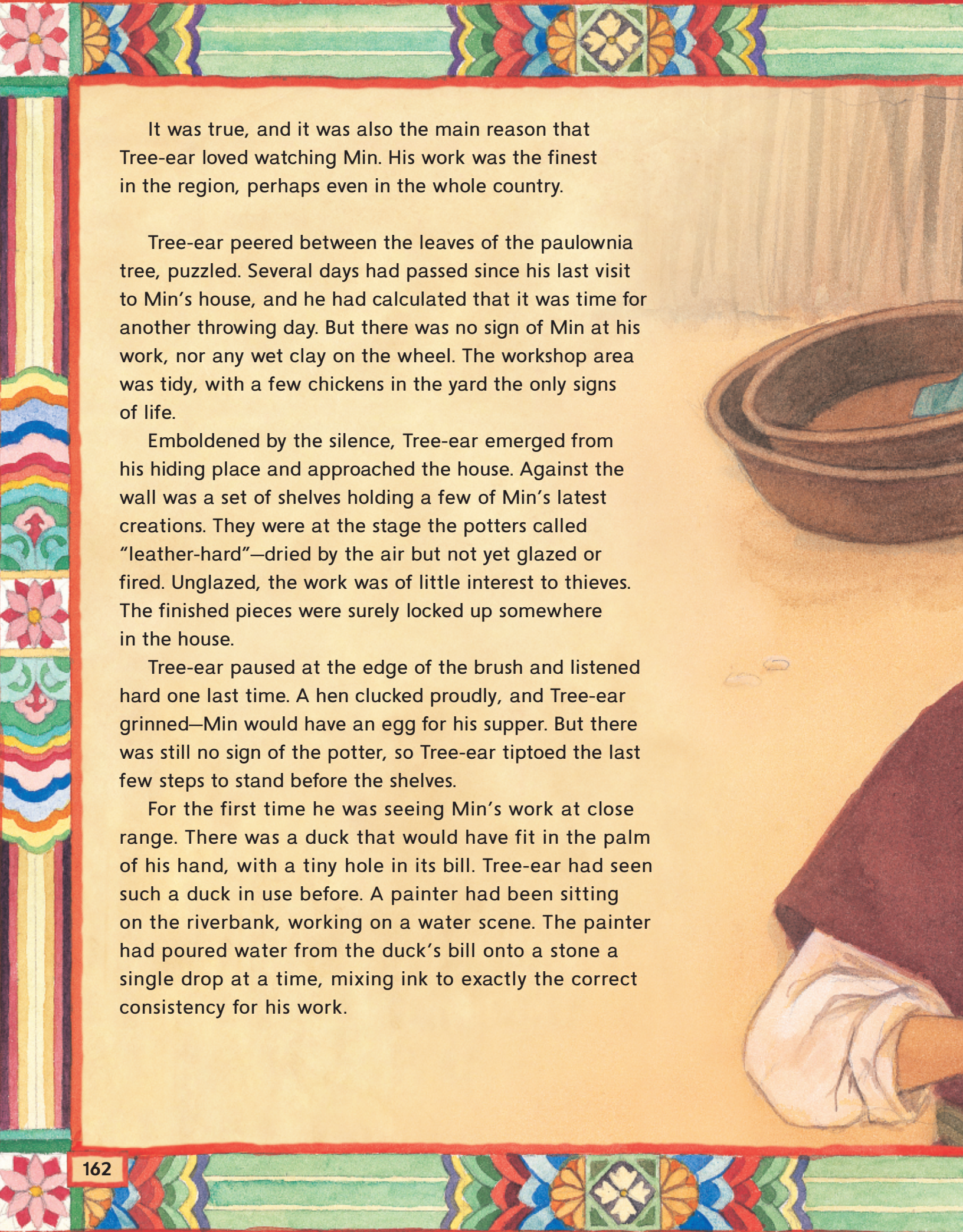
Working without walls meant that Min possessed great skill and confidence to match it. Potters guarded their secrets jealously. A new shape for a teapot, a new inscribed design—these were things that the potters refused to reveal until a piece was ready to show to a buyer.

Min did not seem to care about such secrecy. It was as if he were saying, *Go ahead, watch me. No matter—you will not be able to imitate my skill.*

#### STOP AND CHECK

**Confirm Predictions** Is Tree-ear interested in finding out about his past? Confirm or revise your prediction with text evidence.





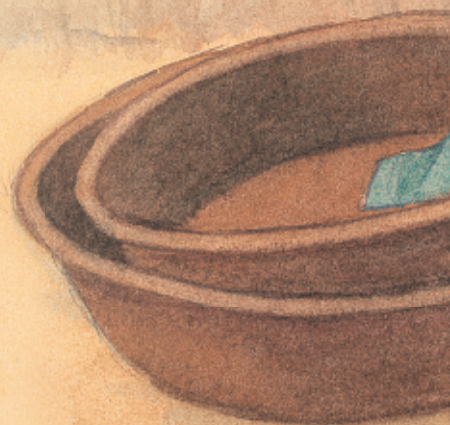
It was true, and it was also the main reason that Tree-ear loved watching Min. His work was the finest in the region, perhaps even in the whole country.

Tree-ear peered between the leaves of the paulownia tree, puzzled. Several days had passed since his last visit to Min's house, and he had calculated that it was time for another throwing day. But there was no sign of Min at his work, nor any wet clay on the wheel. The workshop area was tidy, with a few chickens in the yard the only signs of life.

Emboldened by the silence, Tree-ear emerged from his hiding place and approached the house. Against the wall was a set of shelves holding a few of Min's latest creations. They were at the stage the potters called "leather-hard"—dried by the air but not yet glazed or fired. Unglazed, the work was of little interest to thieves. The finished pieces were surely locked up somewhere in the house.

Tree-ear paused at the edge of the brush and listened hard one last time. A hen clucked proudly, and Tree-ear grinned—Min would have an egg for his supper. But there was still no sign of the potter, so Tree-ear tiptoed the last few steps to stand before the shelves.


For the first time he was seeing Min's work at close range. There was a duck that would have fit in the palm of his hand, with a tiny hole in its bill. Tree-ear had seen such a duck in use before. A painter had been sitting on the riverbank, working on a water scene. The painter had poured water from the duck's bill onto a stone a single drop at a time, mixing ink to exactly the correct consistency for his work.












Tree-ear stared at Min's duck. Though it was now a dull gray, so detailed were its features that he found himself half listening for the sound of a quack. Min had shaped and then carved the clay to form curve of wing and tilt of head. Even the little tail curled up with an **impudence** that made Tree-ear smile.

He tore his gaze away from the duck to examine the next piece, a tall jug with ribbed lines that imitated the shape of a melon. The lines were perfectly symmetrical, curving so gracefully from top to bottom that Tree-ear longed to run his finger along the smooth shallow grooves. The melon's stem and leaves were cleverly shaped to form the lid of the jug.

The last piece on the shelf was the least interesting—a rectangular lidded box as large as his two hands. It was completely undecorated. Disappointed in its plainness, Tree-ear was ready to turn away when a thought struck him. Outside, the box was plain, but perhaps inside . . .



Holding his breath, he reached out, gently lifted the lid, and looked inside. He grinned in double delight at his own correct guess and at Min's skill. The plain box held five smaller boxes—a small round one in the center and four curved boxes that fit around it perfectly. The small boxes appeared to completely fill the larger container, but Min had left exactly the right amount of space to allow any of them to be lifted out.

Tree-ear put the lid of the large box down on the shelf and picked up one of the curved containers. On the underside of its lid was a lip of clay that held the lid in place. Tree-ear's eyes flickered back and forth between the small pieces in his hand and the larger container, his brow furrowed in thought.

How did Min fit them together so perfectly? Perhaps he made the large box, then a second one to fit inside, and cut the smaller boxes from that? Or did he make an inside box first and fit the larger box around it? Maybe he began with the small central box, then the curved ones, then—



Someone shouted. The chickens squawked noisily and Tree-ear dropped what he was holding. He stood there, paralyzed for a moment.

It was the old potter. "Thief!" he screamed. "How dare you come here! How dare you touch my work!"

Tree-ear did the only thing he could think of. He dropped to his knees and covered in a deep formal bow.

"Please! Please, honorable sir, I was not stealing your work—I came only to admire it."

The potter stood over the boy.

"Have you been here before, beggar-boy?"

Tree-ear's thoughts scrambled about as he tried to think what to answer. The truth seemed easiest.

"Yes, honorable sir. I come often to watch you work."

"Ah!"

Tree-ear was still doubled over in his bow, but he allowed himself a single sigh of relief.

"So is it you who breaks the twigs and bruises the leaves of the paulownia tree just beyond?"

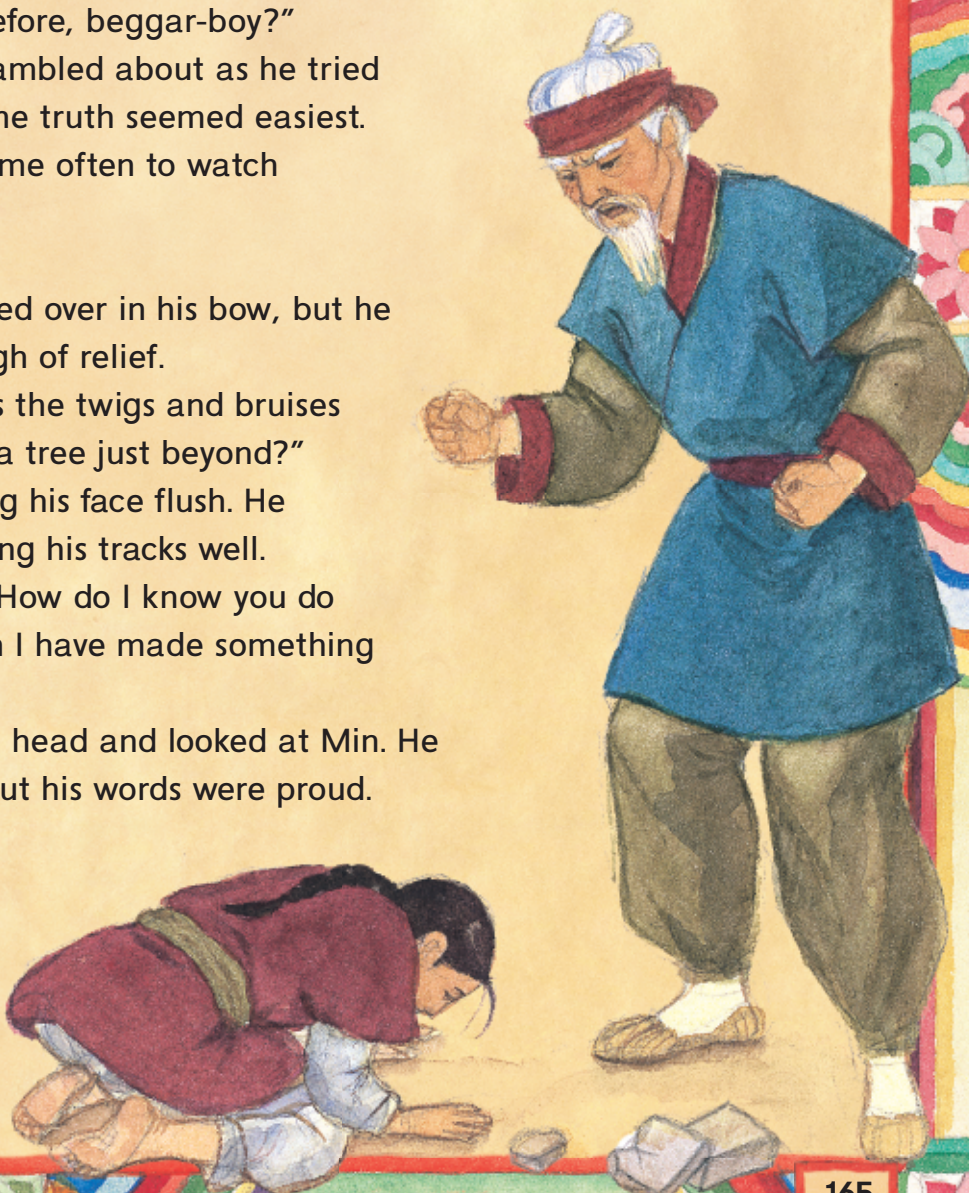
Tree-ear nodded, feeling his face flush. He had thought he was covering his tracks well.

"Not to steal, you say? How do I know you do not watch just to see when I have made something of extra value?"

Now Tree-ear raised his head and looked at Min. He kept his voice respectful, but his words were proud.

#### STOP AND CHECK

**Ask and Answer Questions** Do you think Tree-ear would like to become a potter? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.





"I would not steal. Stealing and begging make a man no better than a dog."

The potter stared at the boy for a long moment. At last, Min seemed to make up his mind about something, and when he spoke again, his voice had lost the sharpest edge of its anger.

"So you were not stealing. It is the same thing to me—with one part damaged, the rest is of no use." He gestured at the misshapen pottery box on the ground, badly dented from its fall. "Get on your way, then. I know better than to ask for payment for what you have ruined."

Tree-ear stood slowly, shame hot in his breast. It was true. He could never hope to pay Min for the damaged box.

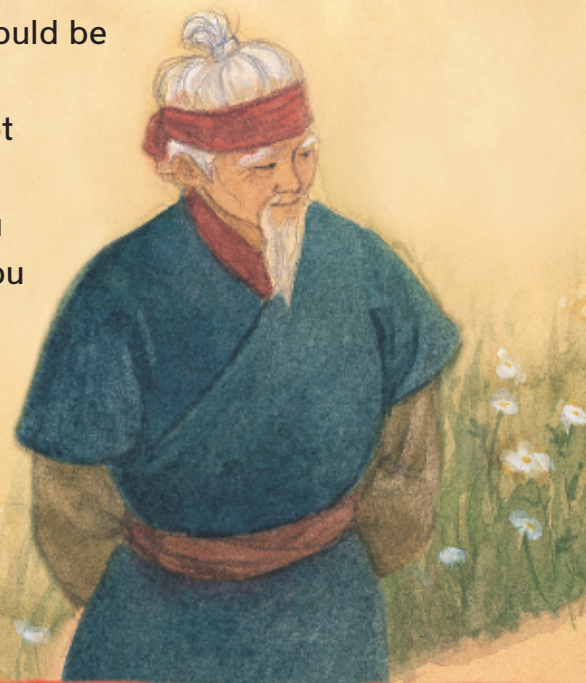
Min picked it up and tossed it on the rubbish heap at the side of the yard. He continued to mutter crossly. "Ai, three days' work, and for what? For nothing. I am behind now. The order will be late . . ."

Tree-ear had taken a few dragging steps out of the yard. But on hearing the old potter's mutterings, he lifted his head and turned back toward him.

"Honorable potter? Sir? Could I not work for you, as payment? Perhaps my help could save you some time . . ."

Min shook his head impatiently. "What could you do, an untrained child? I have no time to teach you—you would be more trouble than help."

Tree-ear stepped forward eagerly. "You would not need to teach so much as you think, sir. I have been watching you for many months now. I know how you mix the clay, and turn the wheel—I have watched you make many things . . ."





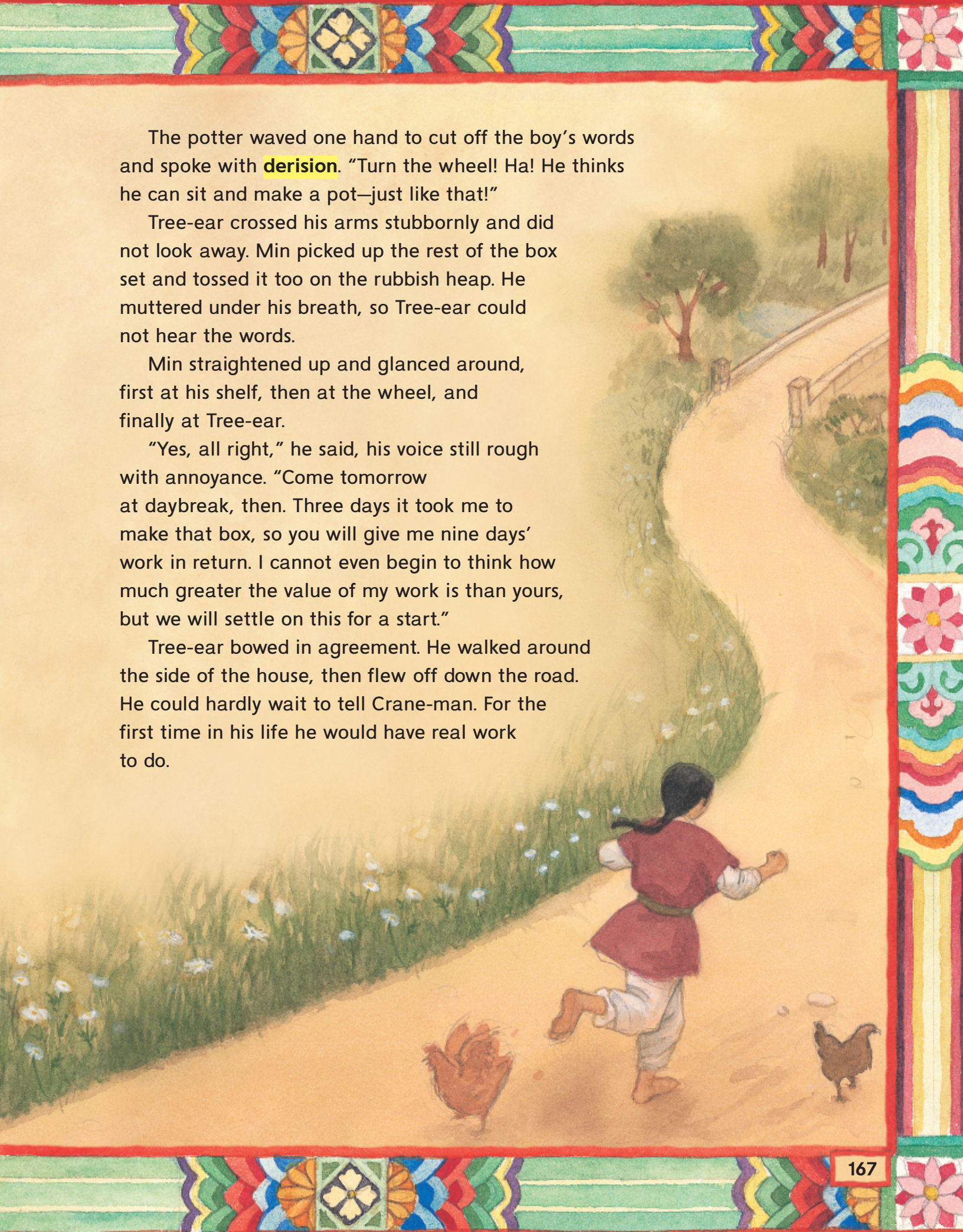
The potter waved one hand to cut off the boy's words and spoke with **derision**. "Turn the wheel! Ha! He thinks he can sit and make a pot—just like that!"

Tree-ear crossed his arms stubbornly and did not look away. Min picked up the rest of the box set and tossed it too on the rubbish heap. He muttered under his breath, so Tree-ear could not hear the words.

Min straightened up and glanced around, first at his shelf, then at the wheel, and finally at Tree-ear.

"Yes, all right," he said, his voice still rough with annoyance. "Come tomorrow at daybreak, then. Three days it took me to make that box, so you will give me nine days' work in return. I cannot even begin to think how much greater the value of my work is than yours, but we will settle on this for a start."

Tree-ear bowed in agreement. He walked around the side of the house, then flew off down the road. He could hardly wait to tell Crane-man. For the first time in his life he would have real work to do.





# About the Author and Illustrator



## Linda Sue Park

began to earn money for her writing when she was just nine years old. She received a check for one dollar in payment for a haiku poem that was published in a children's magazine. Her proud father promptly framed the check.

Linda was born in Urbana, Illinois to Korean parents. Her novel *A Single Shard* was awarded the Newbery Medal in 2002. Since then, the author has published several other novels. Today, Linda lives with her husband and two children in New York State.



## Julie Kim

sees things that aren't there. At least, she sees the things she plans to draw before she puts anything on paper. Julie carefully researches costumes and other period details of the story settings for her illustrations. Julie has illustrated several magazines and books for children and lives in Seattle, Washington, with her family.

## Author's Purpose

In *A Single Shard*, Linda Sue Park goes into great detail about the ceramics produced in Ch'ulp'o, as well as the delicate features of Min's pottery. How does this information help you to understand the culture of 12th-century Korea?



# Respond to the Text

## Summarize

Use key details from *A Single Shard* to summarize what you have learned about the influences behind the development of a culture. Information from your Point of View Chart may help you.

Details	Point of View

## Write

Think about Tree-ear's character and the culture of Ch'ulp'o. What parallels does Linda Sue Park draw between the development of a culture and the development of the main character? Use these sentence frames to organize your text evidence.

Linda Sue Park describes Tree-ear and Ch'ulp'o by . . .

She uses sensory language to . . .

This helps me understand how . . .

## Make Connections



How did the location of the village and the type of clay found in its soil influence the development of its culture?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Explain whether or not you would like to work for a potter or other artist as an apprentice. What part of the work would or would not appeal to you? **TEXT TO WORLD**



### Compare Texts

Read how the results of an exam can change the fortunes of a family in China long ago.

# A Scholar in the Family

## 家庭中的學者



### Introduction

The history of China is filled with the struggles of leaders who tried to unite the people of this enormous country. Since the Sui Dynasty (581-618), it had been possible to become a government official by passing a series of written exams. It was only during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), however, that the examination system came to be considered the ladder to success.

Beginning around 1000, for the first time, Chinese commoners were permitted to have jobs within the government. These jobs were called civil service jobs. In order to qualify for a civil service job, men had to take a very grueling civil service exam.



## Characters

### Narrator

**Grandfather** (of Cheng and Mei)

**Cheng** (a young student)

**Mei** (Cheng's younger sister)

**Ying** (neighbor and friend of Cheng)

**Mother** (of Cheng and Mei)

### Messenger

**Narrator** (*Stands alone in front of curtain.*):

Permit me to introduce you to Cheng.

(*Cheng walks onto stage and bows.*)

Cheng is a young scholar. He has studied very hard in order to take the civil service exam. He is far from home, taking this very difficult test right now. (*Cheng runs off stage quickly and when the Narrator is satisfied that he is gone he nods—as if to say “okay.” Then he continues speaking.*) His family awaits his return.

(*Curtain opens.*)

**Mei**: Grandfather, do you hear that? (*Mei leans out a window*) It sounded like a horse and cart. Perhaps Cheng is on his way home!

**Grandfather**: No, it is much too early. Cheng and Ying walked many miles to the city to take the examination, and it lasts for several days. And when he returns, he will make the journey on foot, not by cart.

**Mei**: I want to take the examination too, when I am older!

**Grandfather**: A girl's place is at her mother's knee, learning how to tend the fire and prepare meals. It was not

long ago that even a boy like Cheng could not take the examination.

**Mei**: Why is that, Grandfather?

**Grandfather**: Years ago, only men born to noble families could take the civil service examination. Commoners could not move up in the world. Today, any scholar may try his luck. Now, government jobs will come to those who have proven skill, and not because they were born into a noble house.

**Mother**: Only one scholar in 100 passes the test! But Cheng has worked so hard. His eyes would grow so tired, learning how to print thousands of Chinese characters. And he has spent years studying the teachings of Confucius, the great educator.

**Mei**: I know. I helped him study by doing his chores sometimes, remember? (*She smiles brightly.*)

**Grandfather**: Yes, and I was very proud of you. You were a great help to your brother. In my day if the earth trembled and our homes collapsed or if the great river overflowed, swollen with too much rain, and swept our fields away we peasants lost everything. We had no other work we could do—no way to earn money and rebuild our lives. If Cheng and Ying are accepted into civil service, it would be the beginning of a great **legacy** for our village.

**Mei** (*looking worried*): What if they fail?

**Grandfather**: If they fail . . . (*Grandfather shrugs*) I don't know. We will be no worse off than we were before I suppose.



**Narrator:** We will soon find out how the boys did! After traveling for many miles along numerous dusty roads, they have finally arrived at the entrance of Cheng's home.

**Mother:** You look so thin! *(She embraces her son.)*

**Mei:** Did you pass?

**Cheng:** I do not know yet, but the examination was very difficult. We each sat in our own small stone cell and wrote about Confucius's writings for three days and three nights!

**Mei:** You wrote the whole time? Were you allowed to use your books?

**Cheng:** Oh, no! They even made sure we were not carrying any notes.

**Ying** *(who has been standing quietly next to Cheng):* Don't forget. You promised. *(Ying exits.)*

**Mother:** Promised what?

**Cheng** *(looking embarrassed and shaking his head):* It is nothing. *(Cheng turns away from his family and stares in the direction of the front door, where Ying has just exited.)*

**Grandfather:** It will be a miracle if your score is among the highest. People have invented so many ways to cheat on this exam. Some even pay the officials to get a better score.

**Mother:** What is wrong, my son?

**Cheng** *(speaking softly):* I promised not to tell.

**Grandfather** *(beginning to get angry):* You should not keep secrets from us.

**Cheng** *(Quietly, almost whispering):* Ying cheated on the exam.

**Mother** *(gasping):* Cheated?

**Cheng** *(Hesitating):* It became hot on the walk home. Ying pulled a small fan out of his bag to fan his face. As he fanned himself I could see tiny notes on the fan's folds. I accused him of cheating and he admitted to me that he had. He simply opened his fan, pretending to cool himself, and copied his notes!





**Grandfather** (*angrily*): If Ying secures a position and you don't, I will have something to say to those officials!

**Mother**: I would rather have my son fail honestly than cheat.

**Cheng**: But mother, someone from our village must develop **expertise** beyond being a simple farmer! It's the only way we will be protected if disaster destroys our crops.

**Mei** (*who has been looking out the window*): Look! A messenger has arrived on horseback. He looks like a soldier. I wonder what he wants.

**Messenger**: Is this the home of scholar Cheng?

**Grandfather**: It is.

**Messenger**: I bring news of the civil service examination exam.

**Mother** (*anxiously*): What is it?

**Messenger**: Cheng's score is among the highest of all those who took the exam. Confucius would be proud!

**Mei**: Here comes Ying. He must have heard the messenger arrive.

(*Cheng and his family all look angrily at Ying as he approaches.*)

**Ying**: What about me, Ying? Didn't I score well?

**Messenger** (*consulting his list*): Ying, Ying. Wait a moment. Ah, here it is. (He scowls.) You were observed using a small fan in your chamber. You were seen cheating on the exam. Your examination was thrown out.

**Mother** (*turning and embracing Cheng*): I am so proud of you, my son. We will have a feast to celebrate.

**Messenger**: After your feast, Cheng will accompany me to the city to begin his new position.

**Mei**: I wish I could take the exam. I've already learned 1,000 Chinese characters!

**Cheng**: Maybe by the time you learn all the others you will be permitted to be a civil service worker too!

[Curtain comes down]

**Narrator**: All is well with the family of Cheng tonight. Not so for the family of Ying. (*Ying frowns, bows his head, and walks off stage. Cheng watches him go, shaking his head.*)

## Make Connections



How did allowing Chinese commoners to compete for civil service jobs influence Chinese culture?

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

In what ways can learning new things and developing new opportunities for people influence the development of a culture? **TEXT TO TEXT**