

BEAUTIFUL WARRIOR

The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu



STORY AND PICTURES BY EMILY ARNOLD McCULLY

Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu

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This is the dramatic, multilayered story of two legendary women warriors, Wu Mei, the "beautiful warrior", and her most famous pupil, Mingyi, set in the vibrant colors of China.

Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu Details

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From Reader Review Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu for online ebook

Macie Estes says

I would recommend this book for older children, due to its length and vocabulary. Rich in history, tradition, language, and legend, this story is an excellent tool for learning and teaching about seventeenth-century China. Mingyi finding her way and place in the world is inspiring, especially for young girls, and her ability to overcome and find her path is encouraging as well. The pronunciation guide and the historical notes included in the book add to its value and its potential to be taught as part of a history curriculum as well.

Sandy Parsons says

First, a disclaimer. The Karate Kid is one of my favorite movies. Close friends will tell you that I try and fit 'sweep the leg' into a surprising amount of casual conversations. I had to wonder if the script writers hadn't heard this story before.

The artwork is lovely, funny, and engaging. The pictures enhance the story, which is pretty short. It does have a 'lesson', the hallmark of children's books, but, like the Karate kid, has an engaging way of getting to it. A surprising end note is that this isn't just a made up story to teach young children a moral. The main characters are based on real, albeit legendary, women. Wu Mei was the founder of kung fu. Both of the female characters were creators of a type of martial art. If you have a daughter, I'd recommend this to you.

SaraKat says

The story of the girl who defied the expectations of society and became a nun/ warrior is inspiring. I thought the way she demanded the young girl learn to defend herself was just excellent. No superhero worship here, but the realization that she could learn to do it for herself. The art was very nice, but I enjoyed the story most of all. These are legendary characters and it isn't known if they really existed, but I sure hope they did. :)

Jasmine says

Oh, I loved this one! I read and re-read it several times, even though I was "too old" for picture books at the time. Great story of surprising strength and history.

Adrienne says

In ancient China, kung fu was both a form of self-defense and a way to train the mind. Wu Mei, a Shaolin nun, was skilled in kung fu. She became famous, for at that time, Chinese women did not practice kung fu or any of the martial or meditative arts.

In a village not far from Wu Mei's Shaolin monastary, lived Mingyi Wang, the beancurd seller's daughter. When Mingyi was betrothed to a local bully (whom she was NOT going to marry), she remembered the story of Wu Mei, and went to the monastary to ask for help. Surely Wu Mei could defeat the bully and save Mingyi from a terrible fate. And she does, but not in the way Mingyi expects!

This Chinese legend is retold with lovely colorful paintings by Emily Arnold McCully. The rich architecture and clothing of China are brought to life in the illustrations, while the Chinese philosophy of the Shaolin monastary shines through the story of two courageous women.

Matthew Hunter says

Wu Mei's pretty awesome. Our 8-year-old daughter couldn't take her eyes off the before and after illustrations of little girl Jingyong becoming a Shaolin nun with a shaved head. And then when that nun starts showing her kung fu prowess? Forget about it! Sigourney was hooked. More than likely, she'd give *Beautiful Warrior: The Legend of the Nun's Kung Fu* a coveted fifth star. I'll stick with 4 stars.

Oh, and McCully's illustrations are pretty.

Skye Kilaen says

Young Mingyi is being pressured into marriage by the bandit Soong Ling. He's a real jerk, but the fate of Mingyi's family's business is at stake. She wants a way out, so she turns to Wu Mei, a local nun who's known as the "beautiful warrior" for her martial arts skills. Postpone the marriage a year, says Wu Mei, and tell the bandit you'll marry him then if he can beat you in kung fu. Mingyi does, and thus begins a year of her life that will change her destiny.

McCully did a lot of research for this book, which is only right given she was working outside her culture and the book takes place in the 17th century. She thanks several experts in her Acknowledgements section, and includes an author's note at the end giving the story historical context. Martial arts buffs will know Wing Chun; that's the name Mingyi would eventually take. (If she was real rather than just a figure of legend, which she may have been.)

I've enjoyed McCully's artwork since I read *Mirette on the High Wire*. In this book, her paintings have so much movement, and her landscapes in particular are gorgeous. Mingyi's initial impetuousness and Wu Mei's serenity as a nun both clearly show in their expressions and body language. I was so glad to find a historical, female-centric martial arts book to complement some of the more modern, funny martial arts books we've also enjoyed.

Charity says

Great introduction to Buddhism and the philosophical underpinnings of Eastern martial arts. This book would make a great movie. Kind of a *Karate Kid* except Daniel is a girl and Mr Miyagi is a nun. They even have the training montage (flow like water, balance like crane, bend like bamboo...). I envision a climactic turning-the-tables fight scene a la River from *Firefly* or Hit Girl from *Kick-Ass*. Might not get a G rating with

that kind of scene, though.

After reading two books about girls whose salvation comes from marrying well, it was refreshing to read a story where the girl fights not to be married and finds her own freedom. ("The world outside Shaolin Temple no longer concerned her. She forgot all about having to defeat Soong Ling in order to win her freedom. She was already free.") Not that there's anything inherently wrong with marriage, I just don't like when it's presented as a way out of hardship (or a handing over of property) rather than a loving bond between two people.

Cathy says

I was looking forward to reading about women who defied the cultural expectations of them and who can provide role models for our young girls about following one's heart. I appreciate the role of Wu Mei's father, who gave her the support and direction to follow her own path; it is a crucial reminder that we adults play an important role in giving our children freedom to spread their wings. While I enjoyed the story, this particular telling of it and its illustrations did not particularly inspire me.

Kat says

First stunning art work.

The story was a lovely folk tale that focused on showing kung fu as more than a fighting style. The nun only took students who did not "just want to beat someone up". As an adult the authors note at the end was insightful. It has encouraged me to do some research into Asian fighting styles.

Also loved that both main characters were women!

Josiah says

This is the kind of a story that could have come from the minds of Disney's finest writers and animators during the days when Disney feature films were just about the biggest thing in show business. The quality is that high.

Beautiful Warrior is the story of two Chinese girls whose lives seem unconnected, until both of them begin to find their own way in life by means of the study of Kung Fu. Kung Fu is most definitely not shown as just a martial art in this book; it is presented with the full luster of its original dignity as a way of life, a way of learning from one's own desires, of observation of real world philosophy and the effects that people have on each other and the world in which they live. Kung Fu is not shown primarily as a physical technique to be mastered, but as a journey on which the keen student may embark, learning and bettering oneself for the rest of one's life.

Kung Fu profoundly changes the lives of the two girls around whom this book revolves, and we see in their responses to the ancient martial art lifestyle the ways in which we can defeat the foes that assail us, too, both in the form of inner demons and outside danger.

Beautiful Warrior is a very good story that will hold rapt the attention of most readers. It has some solid

wisdom to impart, and never strays from its intended path of presenting both an interesting story and an important look at an often misunderstood art form. I would likely give two and a half stars to this book.

Kathryn says

I really wanted to like this more than I did. It's such a super cool subject and inspiring woman. But, it just didn't really grip me, unfortunately. It seemed overlong without any real panache and I wasn't a fan of the illustrations. Still, I love how Jingyong's father wanted her to receive a boy's education and I think the presents some important concepts in Eastern religion and philosophy that many children in America might not otherwise be exposed to.

Amy says

3.5 stars. My niece and I enjoyed this book, and as a former martial arts instructor I especially appreciated that this story got so much about martial arts (not just kung fu) right. Martial arts, when taught properly, teaches students volumes about mental, emotional, and physical self-control. This book takes that concept and stresses, as properly taught martial arts does, that through self-control one ultimately achieves strength, self-determination, and freedom. I *loved* that this book featured female martial artists, and showed them as strong, capable people who were able and confident enough to set and follow their own paths in life.

I honestly don't know how much of all of that my niece got out of the book, though. I think she just thought it was a good story. She was more concerned that Wu Mei shaved her head in accordance with Shaolin practice. When Mingyi (view spoiler), my niece exclaimed, "does this mean she's going to shave her head?!" Not really the pertinent point in the story, but whatever.

This book was far too long and meditative to hold my nephew's attention. He couldn't have cared less about it. He just wanted to skip the life lessons and get down to the fighting. Remember that self-control I mentioned above? Let's just say that some properly taught martial arts would not be wasted on the boy.

Clare says

Kung fu was always viewed by me as a man thing. In this story I was very impressed that it was about the power that two girls had to change their lives when odds were against them.

sweet pea says

this book tells one tale of the development of Wing Chun, set much earlier than most accounts - when Wing Chun (Mingyi Wang) was a girl. the book shows the breakdown of society and the prevalence of banditry, which was the impetus for the development of the system. but, it doesn't show how Wing Chun was developed for close-quarter combat (in hallways or narrow spaces). conceivably this development came later.

although the focus of the story is ostensibly Mingyi Wang and her fight against bandits, the real story is about Wu Mei (Ng Mui). in the story, her father fights for her education, including martial arts. she becomes a prodigy, besting the boys competing against her. when the Ming Dynasty falls, she makes her way to the Shaolin Temple to study and become a teacher. the book shows well the humbleness of kung fu along with the hopelessness of kung fu - that you're never done learning anything and can't rush the learning, a satisfying legend highlighting the long history of womyn in martial arts.
