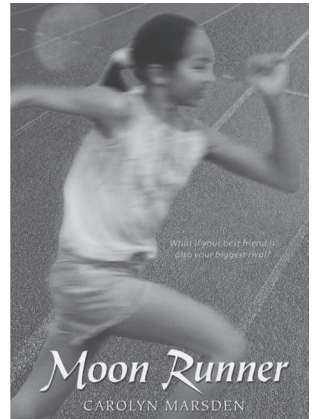
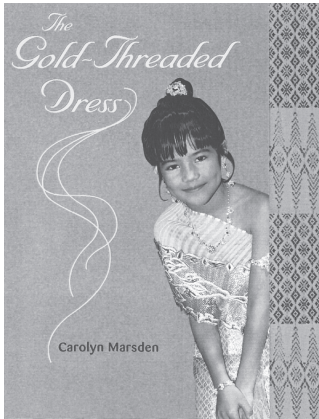
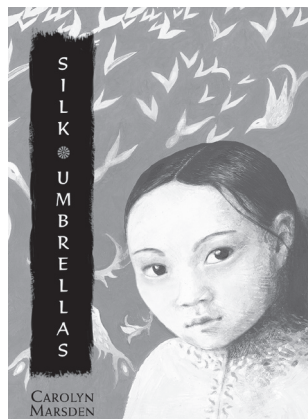
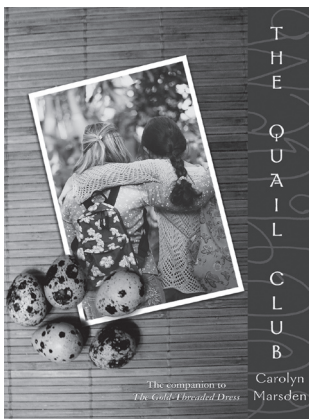




# DISCUSSION GUIDE



## The Novels of **CAROLYN MARSDEN**



# *The Gold-Threaded Dress*

by Carolyn Marsden

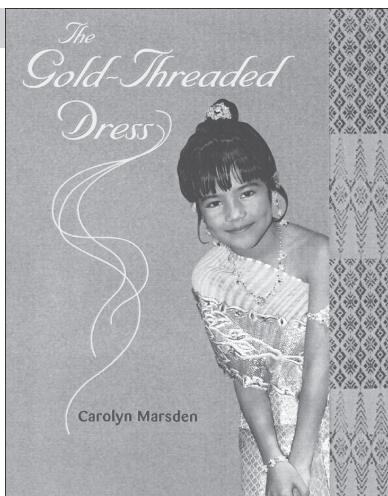
Ages 7–9 • Grades 2–4

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-1569-7

PB ISBN: 978-0-7636-2993-9

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

In Oy's first school in America, her teacher renames her Olivia. Many other things in America are different from the way they were in Thailand as well. The other girls leave her out of their games, and a boy named Frankie teases her. Then Liliandra, a popular girl in the class, sees a photo of Oy in her Thai dancing dress and offers to let Oy into her club if she brings the dress to school. Oy knows that would be a betrayal of her family's traditions, but she wants so much to belong. With vividness and sensitivity, author Carolyn Marsden captures Oy's dilemma as she tries to find true friends and a place in a new country.



## **AWARDS AND PRAISE**

A *Booklist* Editors' Choice

A *Booklist* Top Ten First Novel for Youth

### **Included on the following state master lists:**

- Alabama Emphasis on Reading
  - Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award (Vermont)
  - Iowa Children's Choice
  - The Maud Hart Lovelace Book Award (Minnesota)
  - North Carolina Children's Book Award
  - Pennsylvania State Young Reader's Choice Award
  - Prairie Pasque Award (South Dakota)
  - Rhode Island Children's Book Award
  - South Carolina Children's Book Award
  - Sunshine State Young Reader's Award (Florida)
- ★ "The heroine's ultimate decision to take the high road results in a deeper understanding of her parents, including their shared experience as outsiders."  
— *Publishers Weekly* (starred review)
- ★ "Marsden writes with keen observation and finesse about the social dynamics of the classroom and with simplicity reveals the layers of emotion experienced by Oy." — *Booklist* (starred review)

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What surprised Oy when she first came to America about the way Americans look? How is life in America different from what she imagined?
2. Why do you think kids tease each other? Is teasing always mean, or can it be friendly too? How can you tell the difference?
3. Why does Oy say that her father “still didn’t know how it felt to live in the real America” (p. 10)? How does Oy live more in America than her father does? Do you think her parents understand how difficult it is for Oy to be new?
4. Why did the family move to another apartment? What was their plan for the extra money?
5. What is the reaction to the photograph of Oy in her Thai dancing dress? Do the children admire it? How does their reaction make Oy feel?
6. How does Oy feel about her American name, Olivia? How might you feel if someone gave you a new name and expected you to use it? Find out if your family name has ever gone through a change.
7. What choice must Oy make in order to join Liliandra’s club? What choice would you make? Are you sure? Would you consider this peer pressure?
8. Why was Kun Pa unsure whether he wanted to win the cooking contest? Would you be willing to live halfway around the world for better opportunities in your own life? Why or why not?
9. Describe Oy’s Sunday visit to the temple. How is this American temple different from the ones in Thailand?
10. Have you ever been part of a club like the one in the novel? How did it get started? Who decides the membership to clubs? Is this one fair? Is any club really fair?
11. Why doesn’t Kun Mere approve of Oy’s homework? Do you agree with her or with Oy? Why? How does their difference in opinion represent many differences between America and Thailand?
12. Explain what happens on the playground when Oy brings her treasured gift to school.
13. Discuss Kun Mere’s statement: “To be alone is hard, Oy. But no friend is better than a cruel one” (p. 65). What does she mean? Do you agree with her?
14. What does Oy’s mother teach her about the importance of the dress and why the children are interested in it? How do her mother’s words change the way Oy feels about the children at school?
15. What two important things does Oy learn from Frankie? Predict what you think things will be like between them from now on.

# *The Jade Dragon*

by Carolyn Marsden  
and Virginia Shin-Mui Loh

Ages 7–10 • Grades 2–5

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-3012-6

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Ginny is sure that the new girl in her second-grade class will be her best friend. After all, Stephanie is Chinese, just like Ginny. But Ginny is puzzled to learn that Stephanie doesn't eat Chinese food and hates her straight black hair. And surprisingly, her parents aren't even Chinese. Drawing on her own life story, Virginia Shin-Mui Loh joins acclaimed author Carolyn Marsden to poignantly capture Ginny's dilemma as she navigates between her culture and her friendship.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why doesn't Ginny know about Santa? What does she want him to bring her?
2. What names does Ginny answer to at home and school? Do you have different names depending on where you are?
3. Do you think Miss Fortmann (Ginny's kindergarten teacher) was right to tell her parents to speak only English to her, even at home? How did MaMá feel about this? Why did she agree?
4. Do you think everyone needs a best friend? Why or why not? How do kids become best friends? Is it the same for adults?
5. Why does Mrs. Vincent say that Ginny and Stephanie make a good team? With whom do you make a good team? Why?
6. What is Ginny disappointed to learn when she visits Stephanie's house for the first time? How would you feel if you were in Ginny's place? Why do you think Stephanie's mom wants them to be friends?
7. Compare Ginny's world to Stephanie's. How are the girls similar? How are they different? Do you think they will make good best friends or not? Why?
8. What do Robin and Stephanie make with the embroidery thread? Why do kids make these types of things? Do they sometimes hurt people's feelings?



9. What is a cheongsam? Why doesn't Ginny want to wear it to the party? Is it fair that her parents make her wear it? What is a *lai-see*? What other customs is Stephanie unaware of even though she is Chinese by birth?
10. Daddy says, "Her face may be Chinese, but her mind is American" (p. 79). What does he mean? What do you think having an American mind means?
11. Stephanie has every toy a girl at that time would have wanted. Why do you think she has such a desire to possess the jade dragon? Why does Ginny let her take it?
12. Describe Ginny's Christmas. Is she disappointed? Why? Would you have been?
13. How does Ginny trick her mother into letting her have a sleepover at Stephanie's house? Have you ever tried to trick your parents? Did it work?
14. How do the secrets the girls reveal to each other affect their friendship?
15. Why does Ginny regret inviting Stephanie to their Chinese New Year celebration? Do you think Ginny is becoming spoiled? Why or why not?
16. What Chinese name does Ginny give Stephanie? What does it mean? Do you think Stephanie will like Chinese school, as Ginny does? Explain why.

# *Moon Runner*

by Carolyn Marsden

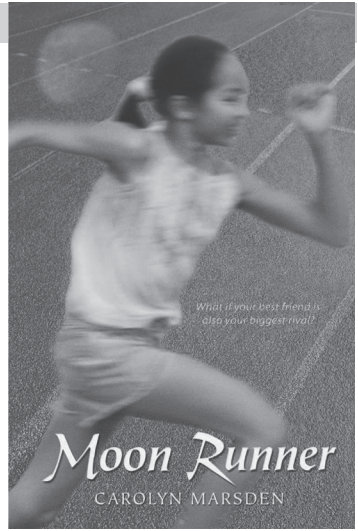
Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-2117-9

PB ISBN: 978-0-7636-3304-2

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

When Mina, a self-professed “girlie-girl” and non-athlete, turns out to excel at track, her friends are as surprised as she is, especially the competitive Ruth. Even more surprising is the way running seems to lift Mina up and make her happy. But when Coach chooses her to run the fifty-meter against Ruth, Mina faces an unhappy predicament. Mina contemplates whether she should hold back on purpose to let Ruth win or give her personal best. In *Moon Runner*, Carolyn Marsden crafts a lyrical and sensitive portrait of a young person discovering her potential—with joy and trepidation—while maintaining the fragile bonds of friendship.



## **AWARDS AND PRAISE**

A Bank Street College Best Children’s Book of the Year

A Maine Student Book Award Nominee

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why was Mina worried about the new school year? Were her worries founded? Do we often worry about things unnecessarily? Why?
2. Coach Lombard explains the citywide meet. How does it work? At first, is Mina interested at all? Why or why not?
3. As a teacher, Ms. Jenner is obsessed by the moon. Have you ever had a teacher with a very specific interest or hobby? How did this affect her teaching? How does a teacher most influence her students?
4. How does running change for Mina? Like Mina, have you ever experienced a fundamental change in attitude about an activity, sport, or subject? What created the shift?
5. What does “personal best” mean? What activities inspire you to perform your personal best? What subjects or activities make living up to this standard difficult? Is it possible to always be performing at your personal best? Do schools expect personal best in all areas?

6. What secret does Alana reveal at the overnight? Why does it worry Mina? Can true friends compete with each other? Should they?
7. At the next practice, the word *unquiet* pops into Mina's head. Why? What is she most worried about? Would you race or compete against one of your own best friends?
8. Describe Mina's relationship with her family. Does she get along with her sister and parents? What details or scenes give you the best clues to their relationships?
9. Why does Mina feel that, like the moon, she has three faces? Do you ever feel this way? Does everyone?
10. How does the author compare Mina's reading the Wilma Rudolph book to her experience of running? How would you describe your own reading?
11. Do you think Mina should give up her spot on the team for the relay? Is she copping out?
12. Why does Sammy urge Mina to talk to Ruth about the race? Is he right? Is it better to confront someone about an issue or pretend it doesn't exist? Which approach do you and your friends usually choose? Is conflict inevitable in every friendship?
13. Ruth knew that Mina did not try her best when they raced in gym. How does this make her feel? Is Mina surprised by this reaction? Were you? How do they resolve it?
14. In the end, what happens in the race? What happens to Ruth and Mina's friendship?
15. Predict what will happen with the Fellow Friends in five years. Will they maintain their close relationships? Can groups of kids stay close like this for a long time? How are friendships proven over time? How do you know if someone is your true friend or not?

# *The Quail Club*

by Carolyn Marsden

Ages 8–10 • Grades 3–5

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-2635-8

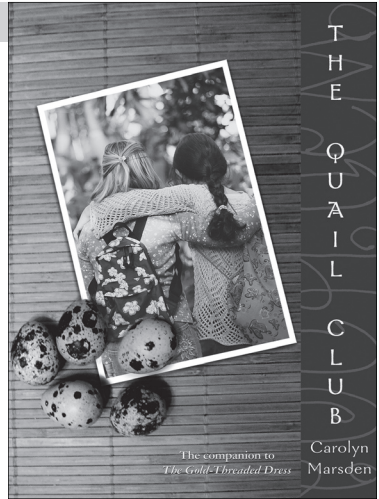
## ABOUT THE BOOK

Oy lives in America now, but she loves to go to the back room of Pak's auto shop on Saturdays to learn traditional Thai dances. She loves it almost as much as being a member of the Quail Club—five friends who gather after school to hatch and care for baby quail.

When the teacher announces a talent show, Oy knows how proud her family and Pak would be to see her step onstage in her beautiful gold-threaded dress from Thailand. But bossy Liliandra vows to kick her out of the Quail Club if she won't team up for a very different kind of dance. Like *The Gold-Threaded Dress*, Carolyn Marsden's acclaimed first novel, this sensitive and finely crafted sequel explores what it takes to be a true friend and still be true to yourself.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is Oy both excited and worried about the talent show? How should she handle Liliandra's and her parent's expectations?
2. Describe Oy's visit to her *wat*. How does it remind her of the field trip to the bird refuge?
3. Would you want to be Liliandra's friend? Why or why not? Do true friends offer ultimatums if they are not obeyed? How do you know if someone is a true friend or not?
4. What is Frankie's advice to Oy about the talent show? Do you agree with him? Why? He says it is similar to an argument he had with his grandfather about playing soccer instead of tai chi. But is it?
5. Why does Oy feel as if she is the only person in her family with American problems? What advice does Kun Pa give Oy? Whose advice should she take? Is that what you would do?
6. Give several examples of things that are different for Oy in America from the way they were in Thailand. What would be the most difficult part of trying to live in these two worlds? What would be the most interesting?
7. Compare Liliandra's life after school to Oy's. What does Liliandra want to show Oy on TV? What is Oy's reaction?





8. Why is Oy so nervous when Liliandra is coming to visit her house for the first time? Have you ever been nervous to have a friend from school to your house? Why?
9. “But she had to admit that whenever she’d practiced the American dance, she hadn’t felt like herself” (p. 68). What does Oy mean by this? Have you ever done things that didn’t feel right for you? How do you know when something is wrong for you?
10. What does Pak make Oy think about? What is Pak’s idea for a compromise? Pak says, “Usually people are unkind when they are unhappy” (p. 83). Do you agree?
11. How does Oy try to change Liliandra’s mind about the Thai dancing? Does it work?
12. Describe the activities and celebrations at Thai New Year. What happens between Liliandra and Oy?
13. Why do you think the other girls in the Quail Club allow Liliandra such power to make the rules? Why do some kids have so much power over others? Can it ever change?
14. In the end, who do you think changes more, Liliandra or Oy? Why? What clues do you have that show how they have changed?
15. How would you describe Carolyn Marsden’s writing style in this book? What is your favorite passage in the book?

## *Silk Umbrellas*

by Carolyn Marsden

Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-2257-2

PB ISBN: 978-0-7636-3376-9

### **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Noi is learning to paint like her grandmother. She and her older sister, Ting, spend hours in the jungle, entranced as they watch Kun Ya paint delicate silk umbrellas to sell at the market. But when Ting must begin work at a local radio factory to help support the family, Noi worries that she will not be able to master her art in time to avoid the same tedious kind of work that her sister must endure. Woven with the customs and language of Thailand, this evocative novel transcends time and place to tell the graceful story of an artist's coming of age.

### **AWARDS AND PRAISE**

A Bank Street College Best Children's Book of the Year

A *Booklist* Top Ten Art Book for Youth

A Dorothy Canfield Fisher Children's Book Award Nominee (Vermont)

A Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List Selection

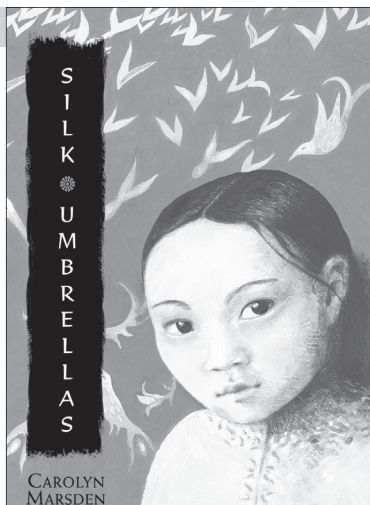
A *Boston Globe* Summer Reading List Selection

A Junior Library Guild Selection

"Fascinating and beautifully told." —Norma Fox Mazer

"This gentle story opens a door to a new world, a very real world that few of us know." —Marion Dane Bauer

- ★ "A short novel in a small, well-designed package, this gracefully told story will resonate with many young readers." —*Booklist* (starred review)
- ★ "The author captures the exotic smells, tastes, and sounds that define Noi's world and shapes an equally affecting portrait of a family coping with the changes thrust upon it." —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)



## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the work that Kun Ya does. How does Noi feel about it?
2. What troubles does the family face? How do they try to solve them?
3. In northern Thailand, women make the household decisions, including deciding where the father should work. Is this different from your own experience? How?
4. Describe Noi's school day. What activities and lessons does she have? What are the similarities and differences from your own school day?
5. What is Ting's job at the factory? How does Ting feel about it?
6. Would Kun Ya have allowed Ting to work at the factory? Why has her influence over the family changed?
7. Noi realizes she may also have to work in the radio factory someday. How does this make her feel? How would you feel if you faced this future?
8. What are they celebrating at the festival? What activities and foods make this a special occasion for the family? How does your family celebrate holidays?
9. Why does Noi feel a sudden distance from her friend Kriamas at school? Do all friendships change over time?
10. What is Noi's deepest desire? Why doesn't she share it with Kun Mere? How is Noi's wish finally revealed to her parents?
11. Describe the setting of the novel. What were the most fascinating details that you learned? What else would you like to know about Thailand?
12. Noi is very sensitive to form, design, and color. How is this revealed throughout the story?

# *When Heaven Fell*

by Carolyn Marsden

Ages 8–12 • Grades 3–7

HC ISBN: 978-0-7636-3175-8

## **ABOUT THE BOOK**

Binh's family is preparing for the visit of her half-American aunt, Thao. No one has seen Thao since she left Vietnam as a young child, when she was given up to be adopted in hopes that she would have a better life. Binh wishes that her rich American aunt (all Americans are rich, after all) will take her to America or at least offer extravagant gifts to the family. Thao does not live up to Binh's many expectations, but in the end she is able to offer Binh the one gift more precious than all the things that could have fit in the pickup truck: an education.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Describe a typical day for Binh and Cuc. Compare it to a typical day in the life of a nine-year-old in America.
2. Create a character chart that lists Binh's family members and other important villagers and why they are important to the story.
3. Why is Binh looking forward to her American aunt's visit so much? What are her expectations? What is the family hoping for?
4. Where does Binh get her ideas about life in America? Is that a reliable source? Why or why not?
5. Explain the monk's teaching about the runaway cows. What ideas or hopes trouble Binh? What about you? Do you think things like clothes, video games, or motorcycles make people happy? Why or why not?
6. Compare the way your family prepares for a special family visit to Binh's family's preparations. What things are the same regardless of where a family lives? What details are different?
7. Binh's family has many different forms for her aunt's name—she is called Di Hai, Di, Di Thao, and Chi Thao. What do these differences reveal about her relationships within the family? Can you think of similar names in your family?
8. Why was Di not raised in Vietnam? Can you imagine leaving your family at age five? How is Di not Vietnamese and not really American either? What would it be like to be in between two worlds like this?



9. What gifts were exchanged between Binh's family and Di? What does Di fail to understand because she was not raised in Vietnamese culture? Which gift is particularly difficult for Binh to see? Why?
10. What details from Di's life in America surprise her Vietnamese family most? How are they disappointed in Di?
11. Why is Vuong treated as *bui doi*, less than dust? Would Thao be treated this way too, if she had been raised in the village?
12. When Di and Binh visit the ancestral house, what suggestion does Di make? How is this offensive to Binh, especially considering the pictures of her aunt's large home in Kentucky? Why doesn't Di understand?
13. Binh and her other family members are hoping that Di will take them back to America with her. Why is this not feasible? Di tells Binh, "You don't understand what it would mean to go to America. . . . You don't know what you'd be leaving behind" (p. 125). What does she mean by this? Did Di understand what people were expecting? How does she react when she learns about their hopes?
14. When Di becomes ill with a fever, she remembers details about her childhood in Vietnam. What details about the war haunt her? How does knowing this change Binh's feelings toward her aunt?
15. How does the trip to the ocean become a turning point for both Binh and her aunt? What does Binh realize about the beautiful outfit her aunt offers to buy? What does Di finally understand about her Vietnamese family and their needs?
16. Why don't Cuc and Binh attend school? How much money a year separates them from an education? What does Di promise Binh?

## ABOUT AUTHOR CAROLYN MARSDEN



“I began to write when I was thirteen years old. I loved Jules Verne’s novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, so I wrote my own version set in outer space. Instead of a submarine, I featured a spaceship!” Such were the beginnings of Carolyn Marsden’s adventures in writing. After writing works of fiction, short stories, and a volume of poetry, all for adults, Marsden found herself with a growing desire to write for children. Having worked as a teacher, she had a keen awareness of what children’s day-to-day lives are like and what issues they face. Carolyn Marsden’s

debut for young readers, *The Gold-Threaded Dress*, received enormous critical acclaim and was named a *Booklist* Top Ten First Novel for Youth. “I wrote *The Gold-Threaded Dress* when my half-Thai daughter Preeya (who is pictured on the cover) was being teased at school,” says the author. “As a parent and elementary school teacher, I watched her struggle to establish a cultural identity. I became fascinated with a conflict that is common to many children in our increasingly diverse United States.”

Although *The Gold-Threaded Dress* was Carolyn Marsden’s first *published* work for children, her next novel, *Silk Umbrellas*, was actually the first children’s book she wrote. “*Silk Umbrellas* was inspired by time I spent in northern Thailand with a woman who worked to protect the jungle and young factory workers,” says Marsden. She notes, “I love to write books about children who are either new to the United States or live in other countries. I write about these children from other places partly because I was born in Mexico City and partly because I have a Thai husband and our two daughters are half Thai.”

In addition to her own writing, Marsden works as a writer-in-residence with classes ranging from kindergarten through high school. She enjoys interacting and sharing with children. Some of her advice to student writers is to “write regularly, even if you’re not in the mood.” She always has several manuscripts in progress and writes every day, continuing to create stories about cultural identity, friendship, and families. Marsden says, “Through writing, I have the opportunity to live many lives.”

Carolyn Marsden has an MFA in Writing for Children from Vermont College and lives in California with her husband, mother, two daughters, two turtles, and two cats.

Discussion guide written by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and author of *Reaching for the Sun*.



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