



# Fiction

Group 2

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Cheung, Bernice – 12*

Forget about the caves, I may not even make it out of this desert alive. Few months ago, I set off on a quest of seeking out the mystical, historical Mogao Caves after a shriveled up, almost—reduced—to—skeleton monk very generously offered me his faded and severely crippled map. Now in this vast land of sand, how I hope that this piece of paper tour guide would magically carry me to wherever it says the caves are, but no point in making pointless wishes. Stuffing the map back into my bag of supplies, I gulped down some water, feeling at least better before trudging on to continue my expedition.

As if walking wasn't tiring enough, the sand acted as claws, tugging at my heels, pulling at my shoes. With my worn out and shabby, sandals sinking ankle—deep into the sand, with every step wearing me out more than the last. At this point, I already wanted to dig a hole, curl up and die in it. After failing to perish in sand, I tried Plan B: Keeping myself busy by making up poems such as 'Oh, the great Mogao Caves, where in this desert do you lie? It is your knowledge that I crave, and I want to get there before I die!' or 'Hello stupid desert, I'm just a knowledge seeker. Here to find the caves though I can never. Holding this useless map in hand, I hate sand', things like that. That went on for a few tedious hours before I spotted movement on some dunes in front of me. Horns of triumph blared loudly internally, and I rushed towards the camel as fast as my sand—clad feet could carry my exhausted body.' Camel man! Hey! Help me!' I enthusiastically waved my hands, shouting.

Good thing he noticed me, but as soon as that, I passed out from the heat, falling face—first into the sand. Next time I opened my eyes, I, in shock, discovered that my clothes were covered in camel spit and sand, which meant that camel man either dragged me across the desert or hauled me onto his mean—looking camel. Before I could get mad at him, he had already left, leaving me yet again stranded on this desert, in the middle of nowhere. I was sure that my mission was in vain. I was tired. My food and water were a few mouthfuls away from none. All hope was lost in this situation, and for the first time in months, I collapsed and lay on the ground, with nothing but sheer desperation running through my body.

I stared at the starry sky, glowing dots peppered across the ink blue sky. Yes, pretty, but yet so hollow. Prettiness won't save me, I thought. Almost at once I was proved wrong as an unmistakable snout of a Kirin appeared right on top of me. I scooted away from it, taking in its elegant and delicate features, its turquoise and gold maw and body.

I allowed the creature to lead me across the desert, coming to a stop in the morning. Ginormous stone doors appeared, elevated by a cliff with regal engravings, sitting magnificently in the middle of an oasis. Could these possibly be the entrance to the long—awaited Mogao Caves? The doors creaked and scratched at the ground as it opened. I took a step back and stared—this wasn't just a library. This was a monument of knowledge. Towering shelves stood tall and proud at almost all sides of the cylindrical room, and about a dozen situated in the middle. A floating image caught my eye, making me more awed than ever. Dragons of all colours glided gracefully near the ceilings, weaving between shelves of scrolls, writings, books and drawings. Sunlight streamed through the ceiling window, which reflected on their multicolored scales, shining under the light and rippled as the dragons moved, casting faint rainbows on the dull yellowish stone walls, running and dancing along with them. Rows of vines hung in bunches from the ceiling, lavender flowers braided within their olive—colored greens, vibrant as set against rather dull green, but blending strangely well.

If the Kirin didn't pull me back into reality by bounding into the caves at alarming speed, I would've just stood there, probably my whole life, transfixed, at the sight. I took a cautious step towards the caves, trying hard to ignore enormous discomfort surging through my feet and legs as I did. Since I had to go through so much to get here, I didn't waste another minute to sightsee. Quickly settling myself down in front of one of the shelves, I pulled out a thick volume and skimmed through the pages. Occasionally catching information not yet known to mankind, I allowed myself to sink deeper into this book's mysteries. I returned to the book's first page and started exploring knowledge from scratch, and the more I read, the more amazed I felt. There wasn't a single picture, but the words alone were alive, and stories throughout history played scene by scene in my head. Sieges, parties, revolutions—the whole bunch of them. Drowning in them, I extracted book after book, scroll after scroll from the piles, reading, taking notes, ignoring the stinging and searing pain in my eyes from all that reading.

After no one knows how long, I rubbed my eyes for the first time and blinked, realizing just how dry and tired my eyes were. As worn out as I was, I moved onto the next shelf, scouting the weighty, ancient tomes. My eyes flew over pages, my hands cooperating perfectly with my eye's speed. I still lived in the fantasy world of the books, or I should say, I lived on the fantasy of the books. They filled my mind with overwhelming thoughts, visions, and it was addictive, soothing. I soon built my own fortress with my read books, enveloping me in a newly emerged pile of reading material.

And I've read on since then, forever in this wonderland.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Cheung, Bernice – 12*

Forget about the caves, I may not even make it out of this desert alive. Few months ago, I set off on a quest of seeking out the mystical, historical Mogao Caves after a shriveled up, almost—reduced—to—skeleton monk very generously offered me his faded and severely crippled map. Now in this vast land of sand, how I hope that this piece of paper tour guide would magically carry me to wherever it says the caves are, but no point in making pointless wishes. Stuffing the map back into my bag of supplies, I gulped down some water, feeling at least better before trudging on to continue my expedition.

As if walking wasn't tiring enough, the sand acted as claws, tugging at my heels, pulling at my shoes. With my worn out and shabby, sandals sinking ankle-deep into the sand, with every step wearing me out more than the last. At this point, I already wanted to dig a hole, curl up and die in it. After failing to perish in sand, I tried Plan B: Keeping myself busy by making up poems such as 'Oh, the great Mogao Caves, where in this desert do you lie? It is your knowledge that I crave, and I want to get there before I die!' or 'Hello stupid desert, I'm just a knowledge seeker. Here to find the caves though I can never. Holding this useless map in hand, I hate sand', things like that. That went on for a few tedious hours before I spotted movement on some dunes in front of me. Horns of triumph blared loudly internally, and I rushed towards the camel as fast as my sand-clad feet could carry my exhausted body.' Camel man! Hey! Help me!' I enthusiastically waved my hands, shouting.

Good thing he noticed me, but as soon as that, I passed out from the heat, falling face-first into the sand. Next time I opened my eyes, I, in shock, discovered that my clothes were covered in camel spit and sand, which meant that camel man either dragged me across the desert or hauled me onto his mean-looking camel. Before I could get mad at him, he had already left, leaving me yet again stranded on this desert, in the middle of nowhere. I was sure that my mission was in vain. I was tired. My food and water were a few mouthfuls away from none. All hope was lost in this situation, and for the first time in months, I collapsed and lay on the ground, with nothing but sheer desperation running through my body.

I stared at the starry sky, glowing dots peppered across the ink blue sky. Yes, pretty, but yet so hollow. Prettiness won't save me, I thought. Almost at once I was proved wrong as an unmistakable snout of a Kirin appeared right on top of me. I scooted away from it, taking in its elegant and delicate features, its turquoise and gold maw and body.

I allowed the creature to lead me across the desert, coming to a stop in the morning. Ginormous stone doors appeared, elevated by a cliff with regal engravings, sitting magnificently in the middle of an oasis. Could these possibly be the entrance to the long-awaited Mogao Caves? The doors creaked and scratched at the ground as it opened. I took a step back and stared—this wasn't just a library. This was a monument of knowledge. Towering shelves stood tall and proud at almost all sides of the cylindrical room, and about a dozen situated in the middle. A floating image caught my eye, making me more awed than ever. Dragons of all colours glided gracefully near the ceilings, weaving between shelves of scrolls, writings, books and drawings. Sunlight streamed through the ceiling window, which reflected on their multicolored scales, shining under the light and rippled as the dragons moved, casting faint rainbows on the dull yellowish stone walls, running and dancing along with them. Rows of vines hung in bunches from the ceiling, lavender flowers braided within their olive-colored greens, vibrant as set against rather dull green, but blending strangely well.

If the Kirin didn't pull me back into reality by bounding into the caves at alarming speed, I would've just stood there, probably my whole life, transfixed, at the sight. I took a cautious step towards the caves, trying hard to ignore enormous discomfort surging through my feet and legs as I did. Since I had to go through so much to get here, I didn't waste another minute to sightsee. Quickly settling myself down in front of one of the shelves, I pulled out a thick volume and skimmed through the pages. Occasionally catching information not yet known to mankind, I allowed myself to sink deeper into this book's mysteries. I returned to the book's first page and started exploring knowledge from scratch, and the more I read, the more amazed I felt. There wasn't a single picture, but the words alone were alive, and stories throughout history played scene by scene in my head. Sieges, parties, revolutions—the whole bunch of them. Drowning in them, I extracted book after book, scroll after scroll from the piles, reading, taking notes, ignoring the stinging and searing pain in my eyes from all that reading.

After no one knows how long, I rubbed my eyes for the first time and blinked, realizing just how dry and tired my eyes were. As worn out as I was, I moved onto the next shelf, scouting the weighty, ancient tomes. My eyes flew over pages, my hands cooperating perfectly with my eye's speed. I still lived in the fantasy world of the books, or I should say, I lived on the fantasy of the books. They filled my mind with overwhelming thoughts, visions, and it was addictive, soothing. I soon built my own fortress with my read books, enveloping me in a newly emerged pile of reading material.

And I've read on since then, forever in this wonderland.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Chung, Shanese – 11*

“Gah!” screamed Nicholas! He had found a hallway completely lined with skeletons and the worst part was, they still had their intestines stuck between the bones! Gross! So they were just dead people with no hair, skin and most of their organs at all. No wonder he was so freaked out! Some the intestines still had a slight pink colour in them! Then he heard a noise, ‘Who goes there? Who dares to disturb my peace?!?’ A shadow jumped out and Nicholas’s blood splattered on the wall, marking the end of his life.

Twenty years had passed since Nicholas’s death, and it was yet still the talk of the town. However, since many years had passed, the story now had multiple versions, each even crazier than the last! But one of the craziest versions was that he had died from fright and his scream had sealed the entrance and exits to the cave. He knew there was no way of escaping so he took a huge piece of sharp rock and plunged it through his chest! But only one person knew the truth to the real story, and that person was my grandfather. He had attached a mini camera (that was a new and rare invention back then) to Nicholas’s helmet and he saw what had really happened. He refused to tell anyone what he had seen, and he only told me in secret on his deathbed three months ago....

After entering the cave, Nicholas was immediately faced with a cross path. He flipped a coin, heads for left, tails for right. To make sure he would not get lost, he stuck stickers (that he had brought) on the walls. They were glow-in-the-dark green colored so he could find his way out even if it was completely dark in the cave. After making a total of five right turns and six lefts turns, he had reached the hallway lined with the skeletons that had their intestines. It seemed to go on forever, but as he walked along the hallway, he found two doors. Again, he flipped a coin. It landed on tails, so he got ready to enter the right door. But before entering, he hesitated. What if that door would lead to his demise? He eventually chose the right door anyway. But when he entered, the room was completely dark except for a pair of bright, yellow eyes. Then, someone lit a candle. The flickering light just allowed Nicholas to see the owner of the bright yellow eyes. It was a basilisk. The creepy thing was, it could talk! It even had lips like a human! Since microphones were not yet invented yet, my grandfather read its lips. It growled, ‘Who goes there? Who dares to disturb my peace?!?’ Then it opened its humongous mouth that had at least fifty-six razor-sharp teeth and chomped him up alive! My grandfather could see inside the basilisk’s mouth! My grandfather said Nicholas even threw up inside the monster’s mouth since its breath was smelly enough to knock out a grown standing thirty kilometers away! I would probably throw up too!

Then, the basilisk spat Nicholas’s body through the ajar door. It landed against a wall before sliding down, leaving blood stains in a vertical line! When Nicholas’s body hit against the wall, the camera probably shattered since the connection was lost right at that moment and the screen went black. A week or two later, another team of explorers (from the same group as Nicholas) went into the cave. They followed the stickers into the hallway. At the end, nearest to the door on the right, was Nicholas’s body, or now skeleton, with his intestine and mysteriously, an empty bottle of poison. The team decided to try check on the basilisk, and this time, since they did not want to end up like Nicholas, they had brought weapons. Machine guns, ammo, poison darts, and rifles. However, when they peeked into the room, they saw the basilisk dead! They took some photos of the dead monster and took some saliva samples from its mouth that, luckily, was wide open. When the report came back, it turned out that the basilisk had died because of Nicholas! The scientists believed that based on the reports and what the explorers had seen, that Nicholas was about to die, so he took out the poison bottle (that he packed just in case, you never know!) and poured all the contents down the basilisk’s throat. So while it swallowed Nicholas’s skin and organs, it also swallowed the deadly poison!

We may never know what was behind the other door. We will just have to wait and see if there will be anyone else brave enough! Also, I am not planning to tell this story to anyone else, so please do keep it a secret. This is just one of the expeditions my grandfather witnessed while he and his team explored the Mogao Grottoes. Apparently, he said, his father went on the Silk Road too!

# New Tales from the Mogao Caves

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Ho, Elise – 12*

Have you ever heard of the Mogao Cave stories? You might have been there, but you may not know about the spooky stories that are hidden in the caves.

Many centuries ago, there was an evil scientist named Master Google. You might not know who it is because he works in a secret underground laboratory. Master Google had a huge dream since he was little which is to rule the world. He had been planning it for a long time. After six hundred and five hours of hard work, he invented a potion which could make dead objects alive. Master Google found out that all the statues of the Buddhas are kept in the Mogao Cave. He knew where his target is at.

He had never been out of his laboratory before got lost. At first, he went to Eiffel Tower. Then, he went to Statue of Liberty. He also went to the Great Wall, and Sydney Opera House by mistake. Finally, he found his way to the Mogao Caves entrance.

He wandered around the cave, exploring the secrets about it. He found many paintings, drawings and statues. Master Google poured the mixture of potion into each and every stone Buddhas' mouth. Magic is happening. All the statues came alive. They look like they have just been awoken from the dead. Master Google grinned for the first time in years, 'The world, the universe will soon be mine! Ha Ha Ha!'

Master Google ordered The Stone Statues to destroy the cave. They smashed and kicked, they drew on the walls, destroying the paintings. They stole all the gold from the chests. They marched out of the caves, ruins to be exact. Master Google demanded them to build a giant fort for him. They spent day and night, days and weeks, months and years, decades and centuries building it. Master Google even named himself the king of the world. The citizens were unhappy as they have been treated unfairly. They demand a war and their wish was granted.

Just then, a monk walked by and saw a war happening, he sighed. He decided to give them a piece of note which said, 'Read this and you will be granted, read this and you would win.' Master Google and the citizens read it and unexpectedly was sent to Mars.

Until today, the story still haunts people. So, beware! Do not read the note from the monk.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Kwong, Hayden – 12*

The feeling of being included, tangled around in a long ago dusty old legend, a mystery, an adventure perhaps arise spontaneously, in a ocean of confusion. Been recently invited by a spirit connection tingling in my soul, a message clearly inviting me to the world of the Mogao Grottoes.

It has always been such a history—the Mogao Grottoes, considered one of the most important collections of Buddhist art in the world. Discovered in the 1900's, one thousand years later it was built. Containing wall paintings, painted sculptures, ancient architecture etc. Even the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

It felt kind of magical, dreamy, like hanging in a fantasy, never ever have felt this feeling before. Never actually went in the Mogao cave, confusingly it has brought up the whole place through a 3D video likely to appear around me, exactly like those VR glasses we have nowadays.... But it wasn't just a video tape shown, it has put a magic spell on those 1000 Buddhist statues, and the paintings on the walls. Making them move all of a sudden. The floor was erupting, I could feel it, lost balance and fell into a hole of darkness eventually.

When I open my eyes, everything has changed. I was in one of the caves of Mogao Grottoes. Statues went talking, chatting. Wall paintings did the same thing. Instead, some stared at me, eyed me with curiosity, whispering ear to ear.

'Welcome to our world!' the sleeping Buddha has been well awoken by the noise. 'I have invited you to be the one we deeply trust against all the people in the world. We, Buddha believe in Buddhism—generally regarded, with good reason, as the most peaceful of world religions. We hope you could proclaim Buddhism all over the world and bring world peace. This is your mission we give you. Please, make us proud!' giving me a paper roll full of instructions in Chinese. The floor erupted again, this time harder.

A bit lost, but back to what I was doing: scrolling along the pictures of Mogao Grottoes on my iPad as a preparation of the Hong Kong Young Writers Competition, who would have known that I have been into all this. Indeed, I will make the Buddhism proud!

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Lau, Sophie – 11*

More than one and a half millennia ago, there was something special about a cave which was found as an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Thousands of pilgrims and scholar-explorers discovered that there were a lot of breathtaking secrets unlocked in the cave—including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.

One of the greatest pilgrims had recorded a memorable news for all people. About twenty years ago, there was an 18-year-old archaeologist called Lork Amanda. People think she is a genius nowadays because she had devoted herself to exploring the mystery of Mogao cave. Lork was a curious and erudite person and she even read numerous books every day, especially books about Mogao Cave. She always wanted to visit this place but unfortunately her parents died when she was five and she had been an orphan since then. However, a scientist named Crook Brown took care of her and showed much care for Lork as if he was her dad. Doctor Brown was an intelligent and kind scientist who was working on a project about the Mogao Cave with Lork too.

One day, Lork decided to start a dangerous adventure to the cave and find the mystery of the art, paintings and books discovered by ancient people. Doctor Brown thought that it was too risky for Lork to travel by herself because she still didn't have enough knowledge and experience so he decided to go with her.

They set off as soon as possible and when they arrived at the cave, they were shocked and startled, because what they saw at that moment was as enormous as a blackhole. There were some huge buddhas around the Mogao Cave. As they walked carefully deeper and deeper, it was also getting darker and darker, just like playing in a haunted house.

They used the torch to find the path and suddenly they found a treasure box in front of them. Inside the box, there was some old parchment paper with a bunch of unidentified words on it. Lork realised that it must be a code which can unlock the curse of the Dragon Warrior as the book said. Doctor Brown and Lork eventually broke the curse by reading that language aloud.

However, they heard a strange noise coming out from the dark, strong wind howled and mice escaped as fast as they could. Something was wrong! Zombies and mummies were rushing out like the scenes in a horror movie. Both of them were freaking out and escaping from this terrifying area.

They dashed along the path and finally got out of the scary cave. Those ugly zombies and mummies still couldn't step out of the cave. Doctor Brown and Lork headed home and wrote about this awesome and fantastic journey.

After years, they translated into books with different languages and every single person in the world would like to read their books. Obviously they became rich nowadays but they shared their happiness with poor people. They often donate money to the needies. Even though this adventure nearly made them die, it was all worth it to let them have an opportunity to be famous and help people around the world.

# The Three Uninvited Guests to the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Li, Charmaine – 12*

The room was illuminated with strange lights shone out from the peculiar sculptures. The atmosphere was becoming more bizarre and full of terror. They collapsed in fear, leaving the room in total silence...

Back in the 1800s, ManKeung was a Chinese tomb raider on the most wanted list. He was proficient at scheduling flawless burglaries, meanwhile sneaking into tombs. He had encountered and solved countless mazes and stopped at nothing to make his steps towards success.

Today, ManKueng was secretly gathering with his raiding partners. His companions had heard of Mogao Grottoes. They assumed that valuable antiques must have been placed there. ManKueng, ChiMing, LeeHo organised a team. Their brains soon whirled rapidly to ponder for a perfect plan...

The next week, the team started their journey to Dunhuang. They had complete confidence in their mission. ManKueng undertook the leadership and manfully took all the burden. They were totally perplexed when they arrived at their destination — the tower was antiquated and mystic, it must be invaluable — but there was scarcely any guard at the entrance.

Yet they didn't have a moment to lose so they just moved forward. They entered the cave and admired the elegant murals which were carved on the walls. They couldn't help being enchanted. But on top of that, the more they explored, the more they became bewildered. They gazed around but there were only dazzling murals. Nothing other than that was in glimpse...

With all the doubts, their intense desire to hunt treasure gradually faded. They were afraid that their efforts would turn into vain. They were about to give up when strong winds blew into the cave. Their hair was blown into disarray. A scroll rolled to ManKueng's feet. It nearly went out of sight because of the unstable wind. Instantly, LeeHo swiftly ran after it and he barely caught the scroll. The raiders were intrigued. They felt a yearning for it. They opened the scroll, their longing eyes were glittering...

Inside the scroll was a treasure map. The map explained the route to the mysterious valuables. The team was surprised but based on their raiding experiences, extreme joy begets disappointment and sorrow. Hence they restrained their excitement and decided to proceed with their journey.

The team walked deeper into the cave. After an hour, they started to feel tired. They took a brief rest and that's when they found themselves in a murky cave, contrasting with their starting point. They all sensed the weirdness. They glanced at each other and observed the place for a moment. The stillness in the air filled them with dread.

Even so, innumerable raiding experiences had instilled braveness into the team. In order to hunt the treasure, they were determined to move on and became alert to every movement around.

The cave turned inkier as they walked along. The route was extended and seemed immense. After half a day, the team was fatigued. Not much provisions and beverages were left. They were all weary. Despite that, ManKueng led the others to go on. The team was targeting the treasure, thus they were clear that they had to persist.

They trudged with exhaustion. But before long, they ran into another challenge. They walked into an impasse. LeeHo checked the map attentively, realising that they were on the right track. The team was puzzled.

ManKueng took a look around the cave and discovered that there was a drain cover. They opened it and found a secret underground passage. ChiMing jumped down without hesitation. He didn't even take a close look at the secret tunnel! ChiMing disappeared in the tunnel without a trace the next second. The others were both distressed... Yet, they jumped in to rescue their teammate.

The secret tunnel was actually a slide. It was pitch dark inside. 'Argghhh!' Everybody was panicking. Even a few seconds seemed like an eternity. After a while of startles, they landed on the underground with a strong relief.

Meanwhile the team noticed themselves in a spacious room. It was brightened up by a few blazing beacons.

‘Oh dear! I think I lost the scroll when I was sliding down the tunnel!’ ManKueng yelled as he was rummaging through his bag. LeeHo was desperate. On the other hand, ChiMing remained calm and comforted his teammates, ‘It’s okay, I remember the content on the map. The slide was leading us in the right direction.’

The room was nearly empty, with a delicate treasure chest placed in the middle of it. The three raiders took notice of the chest. They were exhilarated! ManKueng opened it with a great hankering...

They were dumbfounded — there weren't any precious metals or jewels inside the chest, but numerous Buddhist scriptures, a book and a note. The book was titled ‘Secrets of Mogao Grottoes’. Written on the note was ‘Greed is the root of all evils’. At first, they just ignored the message.

Absorbed in curiosity, the team were oblivious of their surroundings. Meanwhile, there were some subtle changes in the buddhas sculpted on the murals. LeeHo was sharp-eyed and saw the abnormal gleams shot out from the Buddha. He was agitated but doubted whether it was just his illusions. After a while, his partners noticed that in succession. Terror substituted depression. The team was petrified! They split to find an exit to withdraw from the awful place but failed.

They remembered how many endeavours and dares they had in this journey in Mogao Grottoes. But it turned out to be futile. They were eager to get away at the moment. Yet things went contrary to their wishes. Their minds were preoccupied with the statement on the note. They were guilt-ridden, but the die had been cast...

They had challenged myriads of demanding tombs in their careers yet beat them all. Nonetheless, they were defeated by their own avarice this time. They got nothing in return, and even ventured their own lives. Their journey turned out to be a harsh lesson for them...

# New Tales from the Mogao Caves

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Li, Efa – 11*

Caves around the world are timeless. Among the many caves in the world, the Magao Caves are the most mysterious. The Magao Caves which are also called “Library Cave” were formed more than one and half millennia ago. The scholars said that it was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past. Be prepared as I am going to lead you to an adventure.

Before my visit to the mysterious Mogao Caves, my parents told me not to go there because some legends say that after you go there, you will disappear. But I was sure that I could protect myself at that time, and I was wrong. There were a lot of vigorous, magnificent murals and lifelike statues for me to admire in Mogao Caves. I walked around for a few hours and I was worn out.

After a while, there was finally a place where I can take a rest. I spotted a rock under a Bodhisattva statue and it seemed like a decent place to rest for a bit. Suddenly, I felt that everything around me was moving, including myself. The drawings fell onto the ground and the statues were shaking. I fell into a hole and there were sharp lights around me and I was spinning very fast. I was very dizzy and I felt like I was transferred to another world. After a while, I was thrown out of the hole and I fell onto the ground.

Ouch! I looked around and thought that I was in the Tang Dynasty. Around me, there were some temples and monasteries and monks were uttering some scripture inside them. I did not know where I was so I decided to go into the temple next to me to find some help. Since they were too concentrated in uttering the scriptures, they did not notice me at all. Then, I saw a shocking thing—one monk became a dragon and looked like preparing to fly away.

Immediately, I shouted at the top of my voice, “Hey! What are you doing? Why did you become a dragon?” The other monks were surprised to see both the dragon and me. At once, the dragon grabbed me and flew quickly and crazily up into the sky. I kept yelping and yelling for help but nobody saw or heard me. I wanted to get away from the dragon but I would die if I dropped high up in the sky. I was really desperate until I saw a Bodhisattva in a beautiful ring floating in the sky, who looked very familiar to the one I saw in the Mogao Caves in Gansu. The Bodhisattva uttered some words and then threw something onto the dragon. Then, it flew next to the Bodhisattva and we landed safely on the ground.

Phew! I was relieved. I thanked the Bodhisattva so much for saving me and she told me that the dragon was hers. The dragon was naughty and it flew away without her allowance. I told her that I was from the 21st century and I really wanted to go back there. I really wished that she could help me. I also told her that she looked exactly the same as the one I saw in Mogao Caves in the 21st century and how I came here. She said that she really wanted to help me but she was impotent. What she could only do was to let me live with her and take me to Mogao Caves to see if she can help me.

We went to the Mogao Caves together and they were exactly the same as the ones I saw in the 21st century. She told me to sit on the rock again to see if I could go back to 21st century. However, it was futile and nothing happened. Oh! I was tremendously disappointed. Why did this happen? Why didn’t I listen to my parents? Had I not been to the Magao Caves, I would not have needed to live here forever!

As I am a female, I could not be a monk. What I could do was to watch the monks uttering scriptures round—the—clock. And eating, drinking, sleeping and walking around every day. My life without phone, email and internet is very boring. I am almost bored to death! I miss my family and friends and my favorite tiramisu very much. My birthday wish this year is to go back to 2021. Can this come true?

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Lo, Elysia – 11*

Let's just not talk about the caves right now, I am very lonely in this weird place. You might ask where exactly I am, so I'm in a famous Chinese ancient painting named 'Qingning Riverside Map'. I have no idea how I got here. I think it's because of the exact painting in the caves that I've been exploring just now. How odd, cause it just sucked me in within a second.

I assume that while I'm in the painting, my partners will be stranded since we lost our contact in the desert. I think they will most likely die as well because they don't have enough supplies to survive, not even a week.

I'm now questioning my life. Like why am I even here in the first place, I shouldn't be here, especially the painting. Anyways, back to my view. I'm seeing piles of people who are wandering around and buying stuff. I stretched as I knew this adventure would be boring, also seeing myself wearing a historical outfit. I sighed and followed where the people were going. After walking for an amount of time, I was walking beside a river and I saw some big boats on my right. 'Woah, that's a big boat...' I thought to myself. I stepped towards the middle of a bridge and glanced at the river. Sure that's a long river, I can't even see the edge of it. Okay, that was an idiotic sentence, I admit it. Then, I walked past the bridge and I saw more people on this site. They were paying for stuff like food. The food smells amazing. I got near the tiny counter over there and guess what? The man who was selling food was very kind, he gave me some of it and let me try it, it was so, so delicious. Unfortunately, my Putonghua sucks so I can only give him fingers to show him how many I wanted to buy. On the way, I bought so many kinds of tasty treats. I didn't stop eating for once. When I almost finished my treat, I got teleported back to the cave system.

'Why won't you let me finish my food!!' Then I was teleported to a different dimension. The place I am currently in was twisted and abnormal. I soon figured out that I was in a painting called 'The Scream'. This place is not even suitable for humans to be in. My vision was twisty and I felt so dizzy that I almost fell down the highway, I was just gripping onto walls the entire time. 'Hello! I've never seen you here before, who are you?' I turned to my left and saw a whirly guy whose voice sounds like he turned on autotune. 'GAH!!!!' I cried out and I saw myself also being 'whirly'. 'No, no, no. This cannot be true!' I yelled at myself and slapped myself to try to wake myself up from the 'dream'. I can see a confusing expression on the guy's face and I feel like puking right now because of the dizziness.

'Em..you okay?' 'Y-Yeah I'm fine, it's just you're the first one who's talking to me,' he gave me another look of confusion before going away. At the next moment, I felt myself losing consciousness. Around an hour later, I was on a wooden bridge and I saw a guy in front of me who was being shocked and he opened his mouth. I was disturbed because he looked hideous and I thought 'Wasn't that the scene in the painting?' Then he started running around and I got teleported back to the cave.

I've eventually learned what happened in the famous and ancient paintings and that meant a lot to me. Although when I was in 'the Scream' painting I almost wanted to vomit because of the dizziness that had caused me. It was kind of confusing as well but I sure had some fun during the journey at the Chinese ancient painting 'Qingning Riverside Map'.

# The Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Tun, Valerie – 11*

‘More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave he found an oasis in the desert of the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, taking more than caves, and spending their time creating sacred art and literature.

Time passed, and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking other routes. Then we’ll go case in Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar–explorers rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breathtaking secrets. There were hundreds of current containing some of the world’s finest paintings, sculptures, and literature— including the oldest dated, printed book in the world.’

I read from the book in front of me. ‘Wonder why the Mogao Grottoes were abandoned?’ I heard Lori, one of my friends say. My friends, Lori, Cassidy and I were gathered in the library. I happened to stumble upon a very dusty book on one of the shelves, called ‘The Mogao Grottoes’, and my curious self couldn’t help but read it.

‘Well, Lori, the Mogao Grottoes were probably abandoned because the travellers found easier roads to walk through.’ A sweet voice replied. I turned around to see Mrs. Tang, the old librarian. ‘If I’m not mistaken, there is an exhibition of the oldest dated, printed book in the world mentioned, tomorrow.’ With that, Mrs. Tang left. ‘Hey Lori, Cass, do you want to go with me tomorrow?’ They both nodded their heads, and with that, I left the library.

The next day, we all met up at the exhibition, and we went inside, all of the different things exhibited were interesting, but the Diamond Sutra caught my eye. It was full to the brim with beautiful calligraphy and a drawing of different people and skeletons. I was so intrigued that i took many pictures.

At home, I showed my sisters the different pictures of the Diamond Sutra. They were both intrigued with it too, so we spent the rest of the night discovering facts about the Mogao Grottoes. It was a night to remember, and whenever I see the picture of the Diamond Sutra, I think about all the different things about the Mogao Grottoes that scholars have yet discovered. It is indeed a tunnel to a lost world in the past.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Heep Yunn Primary School, Yeung, Peony – 11*

Long ago, a monk found a special cave in the desert on the Silk Road in China—the Mogao Caves. In the 1900s, scholar-explorers rediscovered the caves. They found the sculptures and paintings made by the pilgrims. It was like a tunnel to the past, they said.

What was so special about this cave? For all we know, the Mogao Grottoes could be just like any other ordinary cave. The monk might have been tired, and decided to rest in this cave. Once others heard about it, they must have thought, ‘This cave has to be special for a monk to rest.’ and as rumours spread, it became a temple for the buddha. There are 492 caves in the Mogao Grottoes, though no one can be sure.

A man walks into the caves. ‘Sacred, huh?’ he whispered to himself, ‘I guess this might be the right place after all...’ he has spent his entire life searching for somewhere like this, to find what kind of antique treasures lie. Cautiously, he walks. He steps toward the entrance cave—it is decorated with carvings and paints, though most have worn and faded. His sharp eyes scan the room for anything suspicious. Slowly, still, he walks.

Suddenly, he hears voices coming towards him, and he gears into panic. ‘...to the Mogao Grottoes. I’m sure you all know a little something about here, but let me introduce you to its background,’ a lady said. Phew, just a tour guide. It’s so easy to forget that the Mogao Grottoes is still a national park. They should pay more respect to it, instead of letting everyone trample on these sacred floors, the man thinks. He continues on.

As soon as the tour guide is out of earshot, the man quickens his steps. He stops every now and then to admire the intricate artworks on the walls, illustrating buddhas and monks and villages. At the end of a particularly beautiful cave, he sees it—in the tunnel, haloed in light, sitting with hands held up in prayer. So, without hesitation, he runs.

Bright. Too bright. His eyes hurt from looking at the light. He scrunches his eyes tight and rubs them. At least, tries to. His hands are not there. His eyes start to water, and he blinks it away. ‘Where...’ he says, but his throat is dry. ‘Relax. Inner peace, young monk.’ Taken by surprise, the man jumps. He can’t see anything, but he suspects that it is a test of sorts. He can still hear that mysterious voice echoing in his head, ‘Inner peace, inner peace...’. Once again, the voice said, ‘What do you want, monk? You are here for something, I can feel it.’

The man frowns, deep in thought. After a while, he whispers, ‘What is my purpose? What is my goal?’

It rumbles, ‘That’s easy. Your path, your choice. It is not set in steel, you know.’

‘But how can I be sure? I always feel as if I don’t know what I’m doing, like I’m running in circles with no point of end—’

‘Yet here you are. You came here for a reason, did you not? Come, monk, and I will show you.’

And so he did. The man walks out of the caves, heart feeling lighter than it ever has. What happened in the cave, we may never know. The Mogao Grottoes contain more than treasure. It is a place of learning and teaching. It guided many pilgrims when they prayed at the foot of the Buddha.

I guess what I’m saying is, there are many things you are unsure of, but sometime, anytime, you might know yourself a little better—you just need to find the right place.

# The Tales of the Long Lost Mogao Grottoes Book

*Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School,*

*Chan, Hin-Kiu Max – 11*

More than one and half millennia ago, when the Mogao Grottoes were just built, a monk who had gone rogue put a book with ancient evil spells in a secret room that he built himself. He casted one of the spells, only heard in legends and stories, in the secret room. The monk was called Snake Eyes, his spell cursed whoever entered the room. Legend says that one day Snake Eyes would be reborn and destroy the entire planet, and only one person would be able to kill him with a sacred sword beside his place of rebirth.

BEEB BEEB! The alarm clock just rang and Anthony was late for school. Anthony rushes out of the house and barely catches the bus back to school. When he arrives he usually meets up with his friends Jim and Fred who have been acting strangely recently like going to the toilet for a whole hour together! But today there is a field trip and guess where the class is going... The Mogao Grottoes! Anthony was bursting with excitement to go to the caves. He has been fascinated by the grottoes ever since his mother told him bedtime stories about the grottoes. Anthony shrieks with joy as he receives the news, but Jim and Fred are not at school.

As the class began boarding the school bus, Anthony noticed a green light shining in the distance which coincidentally was in the direction of the Mogao Caves. Anthony thought to himself how exciting it would be if this was in fact a gemstone from the caves with special powers to do something unspeakable! They finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes and were greeted by a tour guide. Anthony was filled with anticipation until it was announced they are not permitted to go inside. His life was leading up to this very moment but it was ruined. Anthony weeping in sadness suddenly heard a voice, he did not understand what was being said but was drawn to it and left the group.

Anthony, fooled by the voice, was led into the Mogao Grottoes, blinded by curiosity and the draw of the voice, he followed it deep inside the cave. While he walked, the bedtime stories came to life. He saw rooms with chubby-faced buddhas and faded paintings, and also a huge buddha lying sideways looking into the void with his big stone eyes. He was surprised by how people from one and half a millenia ago could build these statues. He walked until he could not hear the voice anymore, only then he realized he was lost in a huge cave. Out of the darkness he heard two familiar voices, it was Jim and Fred! Fred spoke, "You know how the two of us are kind of suspicious lately, do you know why we spend so many hours in the toilet? We have infinite lives given to us by our master, Snake Eyes. We are his loyal servants. We were making the emerald for Snake Eye's rebirth through a portal in the school toilets." Anthony was stunned to hear the voices of his friends in the darkness. A green light lit up, and Anthony was scared and shocked at the same time seeing his friends hold up a green emerald the size of a human! Jim and Fred put the emerald inside of what looks to be a mold of a human. Anthony is horrified by what's happening, probably rethinking his choices that he made throughout his life. Then he saw at the head of the mold there were snake eyes. Anthony soon realized that the legend, the bedtime story is true, Snake Eyes was going to try and take over the entire world!

The emerald melted away stretching through every nook and cranny in the mold and the mysterious object began to take its shape. Jim and Fred started chanting a language Anthony did not understand, when they finished chanting a green coloured human figure, Snake Eyes came out of the mold. Snake Eyes in an unknown language asks Jim and Fred, "Did you bring the sacrifice for me to take complete form?" Jim and Fred nodded. As they stared at Anthony, he backed up to a wall looking for something to defend himself with and fortunately stumbled upon a sword. Anthony looked at this sword made out of gold and coloured diamonds on the side, picked it up and swung it around until he got the hang of it. Snake Eyes looked towards Anthony and nearly fainted since the very thing that could kill him was in his hands. Snake Eyes charged towards Anthony wanting to take the sword away from him. Anthony dodges the attack and jumps up prepared to deliver a lethal blow but Snake Eyes puts Jim and Fred up front making them take the blow. Anthony looks to Jim and Fred realizing what he has done, but still remembers that they have infinite lives and shrugs it off. Anthony picks up the sword and stares at Snake Eyes with fury. He makes a

pretty weird battle cry and with all his might stabs Snake Eyes in the hands. Snake Eyes shrieks with pain. Anthony takes a final sweep of the sword sideways to end the rebirth of Snake Eyes.

After catching his breath, Anthony looks at Jim and Fred and helps them get up. Snake Eyes' hold on Jim and Fred was broken. The friends used Anthony's map of the cave system to hurry back to the teachers and tour guide. They apologized to the teachers who did not even realise Jim and Fred joined them.

(Twenty years has past) Anthony went down to his basement to look for very old family photos or drawings, then on the wall there was a family tree. Anthony, curious of who his ancestors were, started searching until he bumped into a drawing of Snake Eyes on the tree.

# Tales of Mogrotte Caves

*Hong Kong Baptist University Affiliated School Wong Kam Fai Secondary and Primary School,*

*Lai, Hei Yan Joanne – 11*

"Ah!" yelled Qing and Ming. "Stop yelling you animals! The angels will hear you from above you idiots! So stop yelling for help!" shouted the evil god of aliens. Then the evil god put a spell on them, and poof! And that's all ancient history. My name is Josephine. I am the princess of China. I have 2 brothers, my brothers are Qing and Ming. They're sent to go to the Mogao Grottoes cave. I was very worried about them. They started their trip in the early morning. Every night I prayed for their safety and arrival, but it never happened. Finally, I can't take it anymore! I told my parents that I'm going and I quickly changed to my warrior outfit and started my journey to find my brothers.

Once I arrived, I went in there and saw beautiful art and sculptures. Before I go I went to the library and they said it's over 400 years of history! I went inside and immediately it locked the door. I took the box of matches from my bag and quickly lit up. I saw beautiful paintings and sculptures. They are all very distinguished-looking. I looked closer at those paintings and saw paintings that looked quite funny and weird. Suddenly, I stepped on a booby trap. Firebombs started counting down to blow up. Darts flew from one side to another nonstop. A few moments later finally the booby traps have stopped. I carefully walk past it on my tippy toes to walk to the next room. Once I walked into the next room, I felt surprised by the buddha sculptures. It was as enormous as the temple in Egypt. Then I saw prestigious art and literature. I tried to see the literature and saw haiku poems. It says...

Follow the blue line,  
Then, find a weird special clock,  
There will be two sides.

Choose a side and walk  
Animals waiting for you  
You'll find your brothers.

I thought, "How did this piece of paper know I am going to find my brothers?" I then followed the blue line and saw a very special clock. "It has an alarm clock function, you can fix the time and you can time travel." said a very adorable puppy. I suddenly realized I was talking to a puppy, but how it's possible? I freaked out and I passed out immediately. A few moments later, the puppy woke me up. The puppy picked me up with his cute little paws and carried me to a 5-star hotel for me to stay. The next day, I felt all woozy, it's like I'd been drinking all night long. After a refreshing bath, I started my journey again. "Wait!" I said. "Why will there be a talking puppy and a 5-star hotel inside a cave?" The puppy and I then followed the clock.

We then saw a gigantic lion in front of us. I quietly go behind the lion, but the lion woke up and roar in front of us. I saw a hurt scar from the lion. I took some holy spiritual water from my backpack and poured some into the lion. Then I prayed to God to heal this innocent lion. After a few seconds later, the lion is healed, the lion thanked me and joined my trip to find my brothers.

We walked and walked to the end of the 2 o'clock side and saw two roads. One in the left and the right. We chose the right side and saw a parrot talking to other parrots. Suddenly, the parrots looked at us started flying in our direction and preparing their claws like we're their lunch for today. The lion roared and the room went silent for less than a second. The parrots settled down and said, "This cave is full of mysterious things. You must be very careful! If not you will get hurt very easily. Here are so my items for you. This is an iPhone, a translator, tracker, and some advance spells all with an instruction book. Now off you go and good luck on your trip."

We went into a machine which the animals said it's called the elevator. I scroll through my new "iPhone" and I saw my brother's face and a weird-looking person. Then the puppy told me that is the evil god of aliens. "Now it all makes sense! I said," the technologies, the funny clocks and you animals talking! You guys aren't animals, y'all are just animal look-alikes but actually, y'all aliens! But why are y'all, good aliens? Aren't all aliens monsters?" The animals quietly exclaimed, "At first, our job is to sabotage you from finding your brothers, but in the end, we don't want to be monsters anymore. We want to be good aliens like the angels from heaven. That's why we didn't listen to our boss's orders." I didn't think aliens wanted to become angels. We arrive at our destination and I saw my brothers captured in a cage-like stupid bird."

Ah! Help!" yelled Qing and Ming."Stop yelling you animals! The angels will hear you from above, you idiots! So stop yelling for help!" shouted the evil god of aliens. Kapow! I immediately opened the door with my feet. I took a frisbee from the bag, its swing, and my brothers were free from the birdcage. We battled the god together even with the animals. Kapow!Bang!After a long time of the battle, still, the evil god didn't give up. Qing and Ming used 5 bows and arrows and 10 ropes to wrap the boss around. The animals performed a very deadliest spell. The animals then gave me the potion, I went up into the boss's arms poured the potion into his eyes. I quickly punched him on the stomach and seconds later the god has fallen and melted into a liquid.

In the end, my brothers and I went back home. Because of our courageous act, I became the new queen and the animals became angels now.

# Journey Back to the Mogao Grottoes

*HKUGA Primary School, Huang, Zi Shan – 12*

“We are going to Mogao Grottoes for Monday’s field trip; your homework is to find information about the place and write a short description.” Mrs. Bone announced to the class.

After school, Amber went to the library. She loved Chinese History and wanted to know more about the Mogao Grottoes. She met Paul on the way. “Hi Paul, I’m going to the library to do research for the homework today, you should come too”. Paul hated history class, he always got a C, so he agreed to go with Amber, as she was an A student.

“It’s too hard!” Paul complained. Even though Amber taught him very patiently, he was still very confused. “Why did Mrs. Bone decide to go to Mogao Grottoes when my brother’s class went to Disneyland?” Paul complained again. “Disneyland is more fun, but Mogao Grottoes may not be as bad as you think.” Amber replied.

“My grandmother gave me this book about the Mogao Grottoes a long time ago, it looks interesting.” The book was like an ancient treasure, Paul carefully opened it and a bright flash of golden light shot out. They felt a mysterious power coming from the book, before they had the chance to think, it sucked them straight in.

“Where are we?” Paul asked in a raspy voice. “We’re in a cave.” Amber’s voice echoed; it was gigantic. Paul stood up and saw different kinds of buddha statues and colorful murals. They found the exit, it was fresh outside, when they turned around, the cave they were in was now hidden among hundreds of similar caves. The view shocked Paul, he thought it was the coolest thing he had ever seen! Amber cried: “We are in a book about Mogao Grottos! We should explore!”

Amber dragged Paul into another cave, he soon tripped on a piece of giant rock. Amber shone a torch on him to see what he’d stumbled on. She couldn’t believe her eyes... They had unearthed the ruins of an ancient temple! The color had faded over time. They made their way up to the temple stairs and went through the door. They found a big rusty bell in the entrance, Paul thought it was fascinating and rang it. The most enchanting noise came from it. Suddenly, they heard footsteps coming. A monk came around the corner and greeted them, “Welcome to Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, I’m pleased to finally meet you.” Amber and Paul were stunned, how could this monk be living inside a book?

The monk showed them to the grand hall, the floor was sky blue marble, the walls were covered with diamonds that sparkled like stars. At the end was a gigantic gold buddha statue, it was sitting cross-legged and wearing a golden crown, around the buddha were patterns made by emeralds and gold, it was a fascinating sight. There were three crystal chandeliers hanging from the towering ceiling. Amber and Paul were astonished. How was the temple was so aged from the outside, but so pristine on the inside?

The monk saw the shock and admiration on their faces, “Your grandmother liked this room too, Amber.” The children were shocked. “H—how do you know?” she grunted; her voice trembled. The monk laughed. “Your grandmother came here when she was just like you. She told me to be ready for you one day.” Amber still felt unsure but wasn’t so scared anymore.

The monk led them to another room. Inside, Amber and Paul could see a terrifying statue of buddha with many arms it sat on its throne wearing fiery red clothes and bright crown. The patterns on these walls were as blue as the ocean, as black as nightmares, as green as fresh grass after the rain, and as orange as pumpkins. Amber and Paul were amazed that the colors stayed so bright.

“I can’t believe that Mogao Grottoes still has a living Buddha” Amber mused. The monk sighed, “This is a book, Amber.” Amber felt a bit sorry for the monk, she had a crazy idea: “I was wondering...” said Amber, “if you know how to go back to the real world, you could come with us and see my grandmother.” The monk was delighted and agreed.

They went back to the entrance and the monk asked for the book, he murmured something to it. Paul guessed it might be a spell, like Harry Potter. The familiar flash of golden light shone out of the book, Paul and Amber felt dizzy and their vision went black.

There was a loud scream. Amber quickly stood up; she was still dizzy but could faintly see a woman standing in front of them. It was grandma! She walked towards her and explained everything. She took the message calmly and the monk went up to her, "Hello, old friend."

Amber and Paul left the two friends talking about old memories and went to watch television. "Breaking News! Statue in Caves of the Thousand Buddhas was robbed! The Monk of the Thousand Buddhas has disappeared! It looks like this." The picture of the monk showed on the screen. It was the monk at grandmother's house! A cold icy sweat ran through Amber and Paul. "Grandmother! There was a robbery at Mogao Grottoes! They are looking for your friend!" shouted Amber. "It's nice talking to you, hope to see you all again," said the monk, he sighed and disappeared.

On Monday, the teacher declared: "Students, this is the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas, you can have free time now." Amber and Paul rushed to find the Monk's cave. They searched for a long time. They found him as a statue; he had a bright smile on his face. Paul and Amber were delighted to see him again. "Oh, that statue was stolen last week, when it came back, there was something written on it in an unknown language," said the tour guide. Magically, they could read the message: Thank you Amber and Paul, please come back again.

# The Mogao Grottoes

HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Sin Kwing – 9

My tools scraped against the rock floor as I shifted from place to place. “Hey boss, look what I found!” I turned my head around just to see my colleague Harry picking up a mirror framed with gold and strange carvings in it. He inspected it as if it was a fine piece of art, fiddling with it playfully.

I quickly shot him a look, and was all it took for him to snap his head around and study other things in the grotto. I found other things like old paintings, paper, sculptures, and even porcelain cups that were still surprisingly intact without a crack even after more than a thousand years.

As the other members of the team were still scraping rocks and stone, Harry was finally helpful and started collecting things like mammoth fossils, old collector coins, and even older coins that China used in the Qin Dynasty.

I was so snowed under with work that I hadn’t realised that the weather here was scorching hot even though we were in the middle of the desert, so I clapped my hands multiple times to call attention to all the others for a lunch break. All the sandwiches were gritty with sand and they were all soggy so there was no competition for better ones.

The grotto was surprisingly big, so there was no time to lose. More jewels, gems, and gold coins were laying on the cave floor. When I bent down to think why all this treasure was here, I saw something yellowish in a small cranny that was barely poking out to the sunlight. *Huh, what’s this?* I pulled out the thing and what I saw was breathtaking.

*An...ancient scroll? Found by me? No way.* My hands trembled to untie the old rope around the scroll and slowly revealed its contents.

*‘Long ago, a diamond was found in a deep cave. Many have searched for this object but have failed, and this diamond was said to hold wealth and prosperity to its owner. The man who found this diamond was very humble and offered it to a rich merchant, who didn’t know of the diamond’s power.’*

“So what happened to the diamond after?” I quickly widened the scroll to continue the text.

*‘People said the merchant passed it onto more people, and it eventually passed onto a rich and powerful emperor, but he barely cared about his own citizens. When an unloyal guard saw the emperor inspecting the diamond, he told many people and passed a rumor. Many citizens were furious and thought that the emperor did not deserve such a good object, so a large group of people planned to steal the diamond. Alongside them was the guard who betrayed the king in the first place, and he gave the group guard armor so they could go in with disguise. People say they successfully stole it and hid it in a wondrous place... the Mogao Grottoes.’*

My eyes widened at the last sentence and hastily wondered where that diamond could be in this grotto as I paced around impatiently. “Uh, maybe, I guess they wanted a good life so they hid it somewhere that would be good? Like, maybe they prayed or something?”

*Bingo! They wanted a good life which they didn’t have in their own town! So they stole the diamond, ran here and prayed! But they hid it! So if they prayed... the only statues here are Buddha statues, so they must have hid it somewhere near a statue!*

I ran around the grotto, looking near every statue, and even though I don’t really have many goals in life, I could say I was pretty determined to find the diamond. I didn’t say that I wasn’t really greedy for money though! But still, I’m not that greedy.

Already out of breath, I circled around the last Buddha statue on the last floor. I didn’t see any trace of a diamond anywhere. I threw my jacket off me in frustration, and continued the search. I quickly noticed a small hole at the pillar holding the Buddha’s feet and bent down. I didn’t dare believe what I saw.

I rubbed my glasses, and hoped that I wasn’t dreaming. I took a deep breath, slipped the diamond into my pocket and tried my best to handle this in a professional way. However, I felt like something was wrong. Terribly wrong. I suddenly felt like there was a red ball of anger and fury inside me, waiting to erupt at any moment.

“It should be mine! It belongs to me! I found it!” I reached for the diamond, then gazed at it with an addicted look. I felt like holding it made me feel different, sort of a powerful feeling.

“Hey, boss!”

“Harry?”

I snapped out of my trance and I’ve read enough stories to know what this diamond meant, but I can’t say these things exist. I felt like holding the diamond drives people mad and greedy, so I nodded my head to myself and put the diamond back in my pocket, gathered the rest of my crew, called it a day, and searched for a place where nobody would find it. Or at least I hoped so.

# The Secrets of Mr. Buddha

*HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Verena – 9*

One day, my English teacher suggested that I participate in the Hong Kong Young Writers Awards (HKYWA) competition featuring the theme of Mogao Grottoes. Without any clue of this theme, I decided to dig into my school's library during recess to collect more information and inspiration before I could plan my writing. Before long, I discovered a chronicle in a dusty corner with exactly the Mogao history. Feeling like having hunted the treasure, I couldn't wait and one second later I was flipping through the pages. It was then that I discovered a yellowish piece of cloth tucked in the ridge between two pages, imprinted with something like a Chinese magic spell. Being a studious and curious student, I uttered the sentence word by word (thanks to my good grade in Chinese I did know them word by word).

It was as if in a legend that my surroundings started to shatter, and all clay on the walls peeled off like my mum peeling onions. I held my tears as I was courageous, and also because I had watched some films before with similar happenings. It didn't horrify me at all. What followed was a massive cave that resembled the illustration of Mogao Caves I just picked up from the book. I thought to myself, "What a wonderful way to travel without the COVID quarantine!"

The next thing that caught my eyes were the amazing paintings spanning all the way from floor to ceiling. Having attended many visual art lessons attentively at school, I noticed something strange. The paintings and patterns appeared in columns and they didn't belong to the same age: I could even tell there were scenes from Jurassic Park and then also Star Wars! I pinched my chin to make sure I was conscious. Something even stranger was that below every column, there sat an hourglass with fine golden sand trickling like glittering rivers.

I reached out to one of them as if I was being drawn to it. Indeed, that hourglass was the most delicate one in front of some drawings that seemed to depict the construction of Mogao Grottoes. At the moment my fingertip touched that little gem, the ground began to jitter, first rocking gently and then severely bumping up and down. I guessed that it was more precisely called an earthquake.

Having learned the tactics during earthquakes from my General Studies teacher, I instantly scurried up the stairs inside the cave and scampered onto the rooftop. All of a sudden, a flash of light was blasting out in the distance. I immediately took a step back and the next moment there was a gigantic stagnant Buddha in front of my piercing eyes. I wore a quizzical frown and gently closed my eyes.... and then I reopened. Nothing had changed, so I understood it wasn't an illusion. I once visited the Big Buddha on Lantau Island with my family, the only difference was that I was alone now, and no one could give me useful tourism advice.

Before I could think of anything else to do, an insidious villain emerged behind the immense Buddha. I didn't know if he spoke English but I instinctively screeched raucously, "Stay back!" The secretive villain might have been multilingual as he vanished at once, and that huge Buddha also disappeared at the very same moment. It wasn't really a total vanish because I found on the floor some shimmering, puny buddha relics I once watched on National Geographic documentaries.

I scratched my head hard. It was obviously too much for the day. When the villain reappeared furiously in mid air, I felt a bit upset because usually it should be my tea time for relaxation, not exclamation! "Give me those relics!" hollered the raging villain, and that moment I confirmed he spoke English and he knew imperative. Before I could figure out the real owners of the relics, these little stones rapidly turned into a colossal Buddha who powerfully grabbed the villain, incinerated him into ashes, and poured them into a brand new hourglass.

Next up was the Buddha giving me a lecture about his role as a time cop, and his traveling in time and getting rid of crooks and nuisances in mankind history, from the past to present and into the future.... Something like a janitor to keep the harmony and cleanliness of the world, but not to an extent that the Buddha would lose his job. To keep his track record for promotion purposes, after every mission, the Buddha engraved and colored the caves with stylish paintings of his heroic acts, and placed the hourglass in front as a holographic recorder which got triggered when someone touched it.

He explained everything, including the piece of cloth that cast me here, which was accidentally torn off from his robe he once bought in a flea market in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province.

Finally, I decided I had more-than-sufficient content for my HKYWA fiction, and I should go back to school before the recess ended so that my teachers and parents wouldn't panic. I politely asked the Buddha to tear off another piece of magical cloth, so that I could read the scripture decoration on it in reversal.

I was immediately tunneled back to my school's library, both hands still holding the chronicle, but now with extra understanding about this universe. That night, I made a little request to my mom that puzzled her, "Could you buy me an hourglass?"

# A Mogao Odyssey

*HKUGA Primary School, Wong, Yang Vania – 11*

Trudging exhaustedly through the remote Gobi desert of Dunhuang, striding over sandy hills, a small shadow moved like an ant crawling on the floor. The shadow wasn't a Buddhist monk nor an explorer, but Yang who longed to steal the treasures inside Mogao Caves to make money to cure his old, weak mom's disease. He gazed across the exotic ground, took a glimpse at the map and sighed miserably, "Still a long way to go..." He followed the compass and kept walking without a groan, finding a way to the Sanwei Mountain in the boundless desert. Beads of sweat rolled down his shoulders, feeling worn out, he still insisted on climbing up onto the cliff for his destination -- Mogao Caves.

After countless hours, Yang finally reached the Mogao Caves. He stood motionless in front of the stunning architecture, and gasped like a goldfish in stunned disbelief.

It was a tall wooden building embedded on the rocky cliff, and the structures were built with rammed earth. Heaped up with layers, red ceramic tiled roofs with wide eaves and slightly upturned corners overhung the tan walls with intricate frameworks. The delicate wood carving surrounding the red pillars showed the gist of Chinese architecture. Moreover, in front of the building were antique pots covered with exquisite patterns. His eyes sparkled in delight as the desire to steal filled his mind, "These pots would make me tons of gold...." Yang glanced around, afterwards, he carefully placed the fragile vessels into his box. A tiny spark of light shone from a cave, it seemed like his selfish act was witnessed. "Phew..." he let out a sigh of relief, as he carried his precious treasure and continued checking out the Mogao Caves. To this very moment, Yang didn't know an unexpected adventure was awaiting him.

Yang was extremely agile as he started climbing up the building. He scrambled up the red pillar like a slithery snake, held his hand onto the wide ceramic eave, then pushed himself up and leaped onto the roof nimbly like a ninja fighter. At a lightning speed, he immediately hopped from one floor to another. Eventually, he reached the highest floor, landed and silently tip-toed into the mysterious cave.

Stepping into the cave, a pungent and moldy aroma filled the room. Despite the unpleasant smell, his eyes soon stopped and fixed on the captivating drawings on the walls, it was covered with vibrant and radiant colors, showcasing Chinese Buddhism relics and ancient patterns. Besides the huge, breathtaking painting, there were vessels and sculptures of the Buddha, the Guanyin and the Monk. His eyes bulged as the desire to steal those intricate artworks surged, "Imagine how much money I'll make..." He couldn't help but scanned around the cave, gently held a fine China, and placed it into his treasure box. There was a glint of sparkle in each sculpture's wise eyes. Their expressions and poses looked alive, as if every one of them were witnessing his terrible act. His legs felt like rubber as his heart was overwhelmed with guiltiness.

Suddenly, numerous vessels and artworks emerged from nowhere. Yang was totally drawn to them, he immediately grabbed as many treasures as he could, not bothering to hide his greed. He held them all in his arms, but when he attempted to place them in his box, a colourful vessel dropped onto the floor and broke into million pieces. Butterflies swirled in his stomach, as his heart beat like a hammer, "Uh oh! I am so clumsy!" A radiant beam of light shone, the mud on the sculptures cracked and peeled, they came to life!

Yang was taken aback, his face turned pale, what a legendary scene! A glorious golden Maitreya Buddha floated in mid air, as Guanyin and the Monk hovered beside her, all looking cross.

"Who...who are you?" Yang asked in great fear, trembling. Buddha answered in a loud and deep voice, "Who do you think I am? I am the Maitreya Buddha, the owner of the Mogao Caves!" Yang realised he was in severe trouble, so he begged. "We all witnessed your crime, you stole the pots before you broke in, then you stole vessels and artworks," Guanyin continued. Yang remained speechless, he was culpable for his felony. "At first, we thought you had a repentant heart, we trusted you will realise your misbehaviour. It was extremely disappointing that you not only didn't stop stealing, but further crossed our bottom lines by grabbing more and more. That's no difference to a thief." Maitreya Buddha sighed and shook her head, "We have decided to punish you!" "Oh, please! I

am sincerely sorry! I will return everything!” Yang pleaded, but it was already too late. Buddha held her humongous hands and mumbled a long scripture. Walls cracked, floor shook, all the treasures and the three gods in front of Yang disappeared in the dust, it was an intense earthquake! “Buddha..? Buddha?” he shrieked as he leaped onto the unstable podium, as bricks and rocks started crumbling. He realised he had to be a trust—worthy and kind—hearted person, so he dashed into the caves, returned the treasures and slid down the doorway, first things first.

As soon as he returned the valuable treasures, the earthquake ceased. The building stood nicely in front of him, everything was the same as before. The only thing that wasn't the same was Yang's heart, he was no longer a greedy thief, but an honest and trust—worthy person.

Five years went by fast, a book named “Mogao Cave Adventure” was published and it was one of the best sellers in China. That's by Yang who returned to his home and wrote a story book, full of wonders and magic, and sold over 600,000 copies all over China. Of course, he earned enough money to cure his old mother's sickness; but what he truly earned was the importance of honesty.

# The Forbidden Mystery

HKUGA Primary School, Wu, Sun-Yu Alvina – 9

“We’re going to visit the Magao Caves this year,” Mom said excitedly. “As I always say, a new year is a new adventure!”

“We’re going to the Magao Caves!” said Dad.

Before I was born, both Dad and Mom were tourists, but they gave up being tourists to take care of me. That’s why they love to travel. We’ve got everything prepared, so pack your things and get ready! We’re going to the Mogao Caves *tomorrow*!” called Dad.

We have gone on an ‘adventure’ each summer, according to Mom and Dad. We’ve went all around the world.

“I rushed to my room and packed everything. Even though it was only seven p.m., I climbed onto my bed and fell asleep. Since tomorrow was an ‘adventure’, I decided to go to bed early and wake up tomorrow, nice and energized. I fell asleep, dreaming about the Mogao Caves.

“Alvina! Wake up! We need to take the train to Dunhuang!” It was Mom calling me.

“Okay!” I rushed out and got dressed. I couldn’t wait!

Soon, me, Dad and Mom got on the train to Dunhuang.

We reached the Mogao Caves. I gazed up at the majestic structure and gasped in awe.

“Inside, more than 2,000 statues are regarded as the greatest treasures of Buddhist art to exist in the world.” Dad told me.

“6000 tourists are allowed in every day. We’re one of the first people here, so we get to go in!”

I rushed in eagerly, my heart pounding as I glanced around. I saw many statues, each carved delicately. I could see every detail on the statues. The works of art were enchanting. I stepped closer to have a look at one of them.

“Dad! Mom!” I shouted. “Look at this picture!”

No one replied. All I could hear were echoes. I saw a sign hanging on a door. It read: “FORBIDDEN ENTRY”. I gulped in horror. Why would it be forbidden? Was something wrong? I was all alone. I tried to push the door open, but it didn’t budge.

“How did I get in, if I can’t get out?” I thought. I felt a cold shiver tracing my spine. I took a deep breath. “URRGHHH!!!” I shoved the door with all my strength. It still didn’t budge.

Suddenly, I heard a slight sound. It seemed to be coming from a picture. I walked closer.

“Mom and Dad?!” Mom and Dad were inside the picture!

“Alvina, you are a Chosen One.” The picture whispered. “We are not your parents, but your ancestors. We are your great-great-great...well, that’s too much. I’m your grandmother and that’s your grandfather.” A woman in the picture said. “Just call us Grans and Gramps.”

I was stunned. My mouth fell open in shock. “How did you get in here?”

“Can’t reveal that,” said Gramps casually. “How did YOU get in here?”

“I...I don’t know, I just walked through a passage. I guess I was too excited, and I wandered here. But I don’t know why I got in here. If it’s forbidden, how did I get in?”

“Forbidden!?” Grans and Gramps gasped in horror. “We forgot! This is the Forbidden Mystery! The Chosen Ones were sent here to solve a mystery! There are three riddles to solve. If you don’t get the answer right, they would die here! The past Chosen Ones are all dead.”

“What? Why am I chosen?”

“No time to explain! You’re being timed! Solve the riddles before time’s up!” cried Grans. She pointed to a wall with three riddles there.

I had 30 minutes. I read the first riddle. It read: *What lies in the middle of the Mogao Grottoes?* “Well, this place is filled with murals and statues and pictures,” I thought. “The answer would be...art!” Immediately, the word *art* appeared below the riddle.

The second one was: *How many lives do I have?*

“Whoever thought of the riddle must be talking about itself,” I thought. “How do I figure that out?”

“I know! It’s asking how many lives *I* have. I only have one.” ‘One’ appeared on the wall. I had sixteen minutes to solve the last one. *What lies at the end of every being?*

“What lies at the end of every being? What lies at...” Voices in my head screamed the riddle repeatedly, louder each time. I couldn’t think. I desperately tried to fight off those sounds bothering me. I only had four minutes left!

“What would it be?” I wondered. “Only four minutes! Focus, Alvina!” I took a deep breath. I felt a sinking feeling. Would I fail? I ignored the voices and focused. I was interrupted by a rumbling sound. One minute left! Suddenly, I saw a skeleton. That deceased person must have been a Chosen One. Wait! That was it! The answer was

*death!*

The rumbling stopped. The door opened. I turned to leave, but I heard a voice.

“Are you going to leave without saying a word?”

“Oh! Will I ever see you again, Grans and Gramps?”

“Maybe...in the future,” They shared a wink. “Goodbye, Alvina.” The picture of them gradually disappeared from the wall.

“Wait! But...why was I a Chosen One? Why...” But they were already gone. I walked out and looked at the cave for the last time. The cave disappeared. I smiled.

“I’ll miss you, Grans and Gramps,” I thought.

“Alvina!” I heard Mom’s voice calling me. “Where are you?”

“Here!” I followed her voice. “Mom! Dad! I missed you!”

“Huh?” Mom and Dad looked at each other.

I saw them secretly smile. Their smile looked exactly like Grans’s and Gramps’s smile. Aha! They knew where I had been (And also the trouble I was in)! Or maybe they were just happy to see me. Either they had knew about the mystery or they were simply feeling good, today was a really unforgettable experience. My head was still burning from the unanswered questions. But still, life is much more exciting with a few mysteries.

# The Monk of the Mogao Grottoes

*HKUGA Primary School, Yiu, Jodi – 9*

It was like a tunnel to a lost world in the past, scholars said.

There were enigmatic, demented samurai defending the entrances to the Mogao Grottoes, keeping travellers from entering the caves. They were also manning some ancient things in a hidden chamber, but no one knew where, until one traveller discovered them.

One day, a traveller, named Aric, was hiking through the mountain trails when he suddenly changed course and stomped through opaque ravines. By instinct, he came upon the Mogao Grottoes, obscured by some well-placed branches, and covered with blood-stained corpses that were strewn around by ravenous, orange-streaked tigers. Aric's curiosity got the better of him and he batted the positioned branches away with his colossal machete, used predominantly for hiking, and entered the caves cautiously. Upon entering the caves, the traveller got evicted by some armoured, liver-spotted hands that snaked around him and threw him out. Aric landed hard on his back but leaped back up in his boots. He grasped his machete tightly in his strong grip, his veins tight to bursting. He attempted to storm the Mogao Grottoes again, but like the last time, the skeletal hands tossed him away. Aric straightened his collar, turned his clammy sleeves up and decided to go to more extreme measures.

Aric sprinted inside the caves and faced a platoon of sombre samurai. He stumbled back, and flattened himself against the wall, as the samurai encroached on him. Aric remembered his machete and brandished it at the samurai. The samurai kept their dead eyes on Aric, and he panicked, sweat trickling steadily from his hair into his ice-blue eyes.

Suddenly, the samurai halted and backed against the walls.

A shadowy silhouette appeared on the floor. Aric traced the shadow to a towering, lean Buddha with a colossal Urna in the middle of his forehead. The Buddha wore yellowish robes. He spoke in a resounding, rumbling yet husky voice, as though he had been crying, "I am the guardian of the Mogao Grottoes. What in Buddha's name are you doing here, plain, and lowly traveller? You shouldn't have got past my samurai. Guards! Remove—"

"My name is Aric, not the 'plain and lowly traveller' you refer to." Aric interrupted. "I was hiking through a mountain trail when I had the sudden urge to change direction and my trekking route. I headed towards your cave by instinct. Something was leading me here, and here I am."

The religious Buddha-like being nodded, almost in agreement. He gestured with his wrinkled hand at the samurai, and they marched back to their respective places where they manned the cave entrance from intruders.

"Come. I will show you what we are," the Buddha retorted. He grabbed Aric's machete and whisked it away, placing it with a CLANK on a steel tray. A samurai whipped the tray away. The ancient wheels spun clunkily as the guard pushed it away like a lunch lady serving sloppy food.

"No—" Aric countered, but the Buddha forced his finger to Aric's lips. Shaking his head, the Buddha took Aric underground, following the sounds of a distinct heartbeat thundering at the bottom of the endless passageway.

After what seemed like millennia, the Buddha and Aric finally reached the end of the tunnel. What Aric saw then made him widen his eyes as big as two gargantuan boulders.

There were a dozen of different compartments in front of him, each compartment containing a perplexing riddle printed on a piece of yellowed parchment. Beside each piece of parchment also sat a scroll which included the answer to the mystifying riddles.

The Buddha dragged compartments out, but every riddle didn't seem to satisfy him until one drawer with strange patterning seemed to interest the Buddha. The Buddha wrenched the drawer out with all his might, as the compartment appeared to be jammed, wedged between two wooden boards.

"Traveller named 'Aric', I sense logic and wisdom in you. If you can deduce the solution to this befuddling riddle, I shall uncover the many mysteries in this cave that many a scholar has attempted to discover, but failed momentarily."

The Buddha beckoned to the scores of skeletons hanging by tightly packed sand on the walls. Some had no heads attached or were severed from the ribcage. It was a chilling sight, though, and silenced Aric in a moment. The Buddha handed the riddle to Aric, and he snatched it.

"The needle soars, lost in flight. I see all, while you have no sight. What is the scenario?" Aric recited from the paper. After pondering the question for a moment, Aric roared in understanding,

"A god? No, a fortu— FORTUNE—TELLER. That's it! A needle soars in flight, and it flies into someone's eye, triggering the 'while you have no sight' line. The 'I see all' line is about the fortune-teller being able to see the future, while the person cannot see anything at all. There you go."

The Buddha frowned at the parchment as he rubbed his chin, and announced, "Yes, you are correct, traveller. Farewell."

The samurai grabbed Aric in their bony hands. Suddenly, a muffled voice rocked the caves.

“The Big Buddha has awoken!” The startled ‘Buddha’ concealed himself under a wooden table, but Aric had other ideas. He dived under the table and leaped back out, yanking the ‘Buddha’ behind him, and roared, “I thought you were the Buddha!”

“Where is the Monk?” the growly voice thundered. The Monk nibbled on his shortened fingernails and faced the wall in front of him. The wall crumbled apart to reveal the Big Buddha, clad in rich red robes, and dark bags under his eyes. Aric gripped the Monk firmly by the wrist.

“You had better do as I say now, if you want to make it out of here alive!” Aric spoke with unnatural calmness, gesturing the monk towards a small opening in the floor.

“Going somewhere!?” The Big Buddha bellowed, as he made a desperate snatch at the tiny bodies frantically clambering for the escape.

# Long and Yan

*Hong Kong International School, Charoensiddhi, Kornsuda – 10*

There wasn't much to see. Through squinting eyes, dust and literature were the only things that Long could make out. The night had crept in, blanketing the environment in a sheet of blackness, with only moonlight and several stars to light the way for someone who was lost and alone. Long smelt the familiar scent of the cave, creeping into his nose and spreading warmth and the feeling of safety into his body. He felt tired as his tail slapped the mischievous floors of the Mogao Caves. The same ones that gifted him his power and brought him new findings every day.

Long was a dragon. One who lived in the Mogao Caves. It was a nice place for a little dragon to live, but it could've been better if his twin sister—Yan—could enjoy it with him. Yan was *almost* the exact opposite of Long. She was adventurous, while Long stayed close to their home in the Mogao Caves, so it wasn't long until Yan had raced out of the caves to see what the outside world looked like. Meanwhile, Long stayed at home, longing for a little company. He had been alone for a little more than nineteen years.

Morning came, filling the Mogao Caves with bright sunlight, which contrasted to the black-painted night sky. Long's eyes cracked open and he found himself where he had found himself every morning since Yan had gone—curled up with his little Word Book.

When Long and Yan were born, they were each gifted with a special talent. Yan was a shape-shifter, while Long had the power to automatically print every word he spoke into an ancient book which he soon named his 'Word Book'.

In the warm morning breeze, Long weaved through the many sculptures that the caves displayed as he made his way to the front entrance. With just one glance, Long thought there was something out of the ordinary about the beautiful scenery—the sky was too blue, like the color of the skies in fairytale books. Long paused for a second, then scampered back into the caves.

Dragons had the power to make food and water out of their very own hands. Even the hardest meals to cook were immediately served if a dragon made them. Long loved this special power that every dragon got. That morning, he merrily made a plate of juicy, boiled dumplings and some warm green tea.

As he was finishing the last dumpling off of his plate, Long felt a shadow looming over him. He whipped around and found a girl with shiny black hair and eyes, wearing a red shirt and a pair of yellow leggings. But the girl didn't shriek when she saw Long; she just smiled and left.

*Very peculiar*, Long thought, making his cup of tea and plate disappear—for dragons also had the power to make things vanish. Something peculiar about the girl made Long think of his family. Long thought for a while, digging for his lucky herb. At birth, Long had been given a lucky herb from his mother. He liked to rub it against his smooth, scaly body as he thought. Suddenly, it hit him.

*The herb!* The girl and Long had identical herbs!

That night was a stormy night. Thunder was rolling and raindrops were paddling in. Long thought that perhaps one of his cousins who could control the weather was furious and had made the sky erupt into a heap of rolling rain.

The next day, as Long was preparing lunch—a plate of fried soy sauce noodles and a cup of green tea—a shadow, once again, loomed over him.

"Long," the shadow whispered confidently. "Long, I've come back." It was the girl talking. The girl shape-shifted into a scaly yellow dragon, the color of shiny gold pebbles sparkling along the sidewalk.

"Yan?" Long asked, curious. "Yan, where have you been?" Yan slithered around and sat on the floor.

"Look, it's the Buddha with the instrument! And look, it's the Buddha in the fancy clothing!" Yan cried, looking at the many sculptures, and ignoring Long's question. Then Yan eyed Long's 'Word Book'.

"Long, how thick is this 'Word Book' of yours?" Yan asked.

"Thick, quite thick." He brushed off the little fluffs of dust clouds laying on the brilliantly large book. "How was the outside world?"

"It was beautiful. Birds chirped, mountains were emerald green, and the clouds reflected off brilliant waters!" Yan immediately blurted. "Do you want to see?" Long wasn't sure. He took a deep breath and bowed his head just an inch.

"Let's go!" Yan cried, pulling him into the outside world. Yan was right. There were hills as tall as the sky, and ocean water that was swift and beautiful.

"Wait until you see my village!" Yan cried, pulling Long towards a red painted sign, with the Chinese characters *Long Cun* in gold.

"Dragon Village," Long breathed. "I've never heard of it before."

"It's a secret village," Yan explained, taking him in to see the friendly villagers. Surprisingly, the villagers weren't afraid of the two dragons racing into the village. A roadside stall owner, with a name tag that read 'Li Ai', tossed two oranges to Long and Yan. Yan easily used her sharp nail to rip the skin of the orange off. Long, however, struggled.

"Dig your finger in, and pull!" Yan said, popping the orange into her mouth. Long, after five minutes, had a nice, fresh orange. It tasted even more delicious than the oranges that dragons made. Then Yan showed him all her favorite places she'd been to in the past nineteen years. Yan's favorite was a fountain with goldfish, displaying illusions in the water. At last, dusk fell, and the dragon twins went home.

Long was a dragon. One who lived in the Mogao Caves. It was a nice place for a little dragon to live, and it was even better because he could share it with his twin sister—Yan.

# Angry Statue

*Hong Kong International School, Ching, Tse Tin Christie – 9*

Kim unlocked the front door, entered the living room, and found piles of clothing and large suitcases strewn on the floor. She saw her brother Tim sitting next to a large open suitcase.

Kim joined Tim on the floor and leaned over to whisper, “Do you know anything about this? What are they doing?”

Tim replied, “I think we are going on a vacation!”

Kim said, “Vacation? That sounds fun! Mom, Dad, I’m home!”

“Finally you are home!” said Mom. “We are going somewhere awesome! The Mogao Caves of China!”

Kim yelled, “Woo-hooooo!”

Tim questioned, “What? Where is that?”

Dad shouted, “China! They are famous! We don't want to be late for our flight!”

The flight from Hong Kong to Dunhuang City was short. After checking in their hotel, they got a good night’s sleep. In the morning, the family was ready to join the tour group and boarded a bus to take them to explore the caves.

“Good morning everyone! Here are some guides and a map for today’s adventure!” the tour guide announced with a creepy smile. A small group of tourists was gathering around the guide to listen to instructions, as Kim and Tim grabbed their matching hats. Mom applied some sunscreen and smeared it all over Kim and Tim.

Kim thought, “Ewww this sunscreen is sticky....and why do we need sunscreen in a cave?”

“Are we going to walk around this gigantic cave in one day?” inquired Tim in disbelief.

Mom replied with a giggle, “This is a large cave complex. It would take a month to see this area!!”

Relieved, Tim said, “Thank goddess! I would die if I had to see this whole cave in one day!!”

The tour guide explained the tour would be a half day of exploration and then a return back to Dunhuang City by bus. The group followed the guide into the dark cave complex. As they entered the cave, the guide turned to the group and said, “Welcome, you just never know what you might see in these caves!”

The main entrance to the cave was a massive series of wooden tiled levels. The structure was ancient and impressive! Once inside, the guide walked them past cave paintings of Buddha. The paintings were very colorful and detailed. The tour continued toward a large gold Buddha sleeping on its side.

“It-t-t-t-t’s so dark!” quivered Tim. He was getting more anxious as the tour moved deeper into the cave.

Kim joked, “Hey, look at that statue Tim! Imagine if it could speak and tell us all about his useless, sleepy life!”

Tim, Dad and Mom gathered around the large statue to take a better look. As the family gathered closer to the statue, the rest of the tour disappeared. The family was now separated from the rest of the tour group!

The family laughed and joked about the statue disrespectfully. Suddenly, its golden eyes opened, and it sat up and said, “HEY, Back off! How dare you talk about me like that! You are so rude!” The family froze in shock and disbelief. An ancient statue was speaking to them!

Kim gasped, “What is going on?”

Tim, in a high pitched voice, screamed “AHHHHHHH!, SOMEONE HELP!!!”

The family quickly glanced around and realized that they were alone! The tour was gone, and they were dealing with an angry statue that had come alive! Mom quickly grabbed Tim and Kim in her arms while Dad stepped in front to protect them.

Dad addressed the agitated statue with a shaking voice. “Excuse me, we didn’t mean any harm. We didn’t realize that we were being rude or disrespectful. We apologize.”

All around the family, the entrances and exits began closing off with large stone gates. They were now trapped in this chamber with the angry statue! The family had to think fast to escape! The angry statue had triggered the entrances and exits to be blocked!

The family ran toward one of the exits and pounded on the rock barrier. It wouldn’t budge. The statue stood up and started slowly moving step by step toward them with heavy golden feet. The family ran to try another exit. It was also blocked by a pile of stones! Extremely frightened, Dad grabbed a stone and tossed it quickly to one side. Mom, Tim and Kim followed Dad’s example and started grabbing stones and tossing them aside. The statue continued to move step by step closer and closer to the frightened family!

Then, suddenly Tim noticed a small stone statue to the left of the blocked entrance. He quickly ran over and grabbed the statue calling for help from Dad. Dad and Tim carried the statue towards the pile of rocks to help push them away. As they picked up the statue, Tim noticed a button hidden where the statue had been lifted. Thinking quickly, Tim pushed the button, and one of the other blocked entrances suddenly reopened! The large stone door had moved aside, and an opening was created.

Dad shouted at Tim, Kim, and Mom to run toward the opening. Dad ran to the other side of the chamber to distract the statue while they ran toward the opening. The statue changed direction and started moving slowly toward Dad as the rest of the family ran for safety through the opening. As he ran, Tim turned and shouted at the statue to distract it so Dad was able to run through the opening before the statue could grab him. As the family continued through the small opening and down a small tunnel, they could hear the statue moaning in frustration. The statue was too big to follow them through the tunnel.

The tunnel led the family back outside to the main entrance. Once outside and safe, the family was relieved. They hugged each other and decided to return to Dunhuang City immediately. They had seen enough and they learned the importance of never judging others!

Turning around, I look at my friends. There is Soo Yung Park, known for her amazing ability to hold her breath for a long time while free diving. The confident Vera, who climbs steep mountains like stairs. Quinn Jonson and Heather Jonson are twins and share not only identical looks, but a passion for hiking. My name is Ava Harvey, and I am the leader of our group. I blow my hair out of my eyes and trudge forwards as my party follows. Today our destination is the Mogao Grottoes on the Silk Road in China, located on the cliffs above the Dachuan River. They were discovered by a monk named Yuezun in 1900. A few scientists have gone, but they have only found little buddha sculptures, the sandy remnants of ancient art and rocks and dusty walls of stone with long cracks that seemed to never end.

Kkksss! The wild wind thrashes the golden sand grains and sends them flying everywhere. Peering into the dark, mysterious tunnels, curiosity sparks. I find myself running my hand over the cracked but smooth rocks, as if they were the most amazing thing in the world. “Woah!” Quinn gasps, tripping over a submerged mossy rock. I rush over to see if she’s okay, when a small glint of green catches my eye.

I head towards the rock and look closely, but it isn’t a rock! It is a finely carved jade dragon! I get a firm grasp on it and pull it out. The cave fills with a deep rumbling noise that is like the roar of a lion.

The sound intensifies, echoing and bouncing around the walls of the cave. Then, as suddenly as it started, it abruptly ends. The horrible sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach vanishes, but the cave’s job wasn’t done. Where the jade sculpture had been, an enormous trap door swings open.

“Should we go in?” squeaks Soo Yung, her usually flushed face now pale as snow. I give her a grave nod. “It’s okay, I’ll go first, and I’ll let you know what I see, ‘kay?” They all nod, too shocked to speak. I uncurl my handy rope ladder and begin to climb down slowly until I reach the ground. It’s pitch black down there and I grope around for my powerful torch. As the strong beam of light shines, I call out, “It’s okay! You can come down now!” One by one, I make sure that everyone comes down safely, and their feet have to touch the ground before the next woman descends. We all turn on our torches, and the combined light fills the whole cave with brightness. To our dismay, the room is bare. I half expected something extraordinary, something worth all the work we had put together. Vera kicks the wall with all her strength in frustration.

Rubbing her sore toes, she looks up as Heather squeals in excitement, pointing at the wall Vera just kicked. “Look, I think you found a pathway, Vera!” I look over and discover, she is right! A large tunnel is hidden in the wall. This is so thrilling!

We crawl into the tunnel single file, hardly able to contain our excitement. We find ourselves in a spacious room, filled with a giant mountain of gold coins, beautiful jewelry, art, bamboo scrolls filled with Chinese poems and remnants of past life. I smile at my friends, watching them try out jewelry and gaze at everything in awe. What interests me most out of all the other treasures is a pure gold, jewel encrusted crown that sits on top of the mountain of coins. As I grab it, the floor opens with a CA-CHUNK and as the howling wind in my ears muffles me and my friends’ screams, I find myself falling into the darkness.

Simone

Discover hidden tunnels with jewelry and treasure, bamboo scrolls(poems?)and remains of the past(find out how people of the past lived (in china))

Everything happens in one day, keep short, detail, not way too much. Keep short but still interesting

# A Journey In Time

*Hong Kong International School, Lin, Arianna – 9*

I hear my dad's voice, I turn around but he's not here. My dad is a world-famous scientist, and right now he's giving a speech to other scientists on TV. How do I feel about this? I don't know, I've got mixed feelings, at least that's what I tell others. In fact, I hate it, I hate it that he can't come home, I hate it that he loves his science more than his family, and most of all I hate it that he cares about his stupid projects more than coming home to see me. Suddenly I hear him say something. He's invented a time machine? So that's what's behind our house in his lab. Maybe once his machines will be useful. A smile crosses my face, I think I've just got a way to get my dad's attention and possibly the whole world's.

I look at the towering time machine, bright orange and round with a silver metal streak. I inhale then exhale, trying to calm myself. This was something I never would have done. Before I could step in I looked at an assemblage of knobs and switches, I pressed a green button, but it didn't work, then I clicked a red button, nope. Finally, I pushed a pink button. To my surprise, the door to the time machine slid open. In front of me, I see an array of buttons. I'm not sure what to do, so I click every button in sight, that was probably a dumb move. Now I have a bad feeling creeping into my stomach. I knew this was the wrong thing to do, it's too late to go back. I open my eyes and see I'm standing in front of a cave. Not only that, but I see a person, carving on the stone, could this be the Mogao Grottoes?. I hide, fearing he will see me. "Shoot" I mutter, then reconsider and stay quiet, I'm terrified. The person seems to be aware of my presence; as he slowly turns, the hairs on my neck stand on end. I run back to the time machine, panting. Soon I click the next button but when I step out I'm still not in my dad's lab. I saw the cave where the person was, though now it has been finished. The man wasn't there anymore. In his place hundreds of pilgrims were bustling about the magnificent Mogao Grottoes, one making a sculpture, one was writing a book. When I looked down, I was dressed just like them, I wore a loose robe that went down to my feet, almost like a dress. When I speak my voice comes out different as if it was a whole new language, and soon I figure out the rest of the people aren't speaking English, though I couldn't quite place it. Throughout the breathtaking architecture, delicate and exquisite embroidery, and thrilling stories. One thing caught my eye, a colorful painting on silk. It was so beautiful, I couldn't help but admire it. I reach out to touch it. I put it on my neck and think "wow, this is so pretty" I loosen the knot on the cloth, almost instantly I see a book for all I know it's the first book to be printed! After a while, I decided to head home before it gets too late. I climb back into the chair and press a button to go home. When I press the button, I notice the cloth is still around my neck, Oh no, I brought something back from the Mogao Grottoes!

Once I get back, I see my dad at home and confess what I have done. I expect him to scold me or at least give me a lecture, but he just laughs "my time machine isn't real, it's a virtual reality simulation. And I designed the experience for you. Do you remember what day it is today?" "Ummm..." I reply, "It's your birthday! And the scarf is a present for you" I run up and hug him, "Thank you. That was such a wonderful surprise to see, and I learned so much about the Mogao grottoes

# The Mogao Grottoes

*Hong Kong International School, Sanchez, Margaux – 9*

Once, a long millenia ago...

Hi I'm a monk, and I am going to tell you about my journey to The Mogao caves...

Once I was walking on China's Silk Road and I suddenly saw a cave, walking by, I stopped to take a peek so I walked inside and soil grains were falling down " PLOP! PLOP!". There were echoes while I walked. I heard the sound of bats flying around. I walked deeper inside the cave. I was starting to think that the cave was not as special as I thought it was, so I decided to get out of the cave.

The next day I was eating breakfast and I started to think that the cave was actually magical or even more interesting, so I finished my breakfast quickly and went down ,back to the cave on the Silk Road.

This time I went even deeper into the cave and then I saw something,something shiny peeking out and even other shiny things, and murals on the walls!

I dug until I saw the whole thing. I brushed off some rust and the dust and I put them back in the cave and not in my hands, and I buried them again because they were once someone's, I will let them keep their possessions.

Suddenly I thought about burying my own stuff in the cave since it might be a tradition, I'm not the one who's going to break it.

I ran back home and gathered some of my stuff and buried it. I was NOT going to put my favourite things in there!

Then I ran back while setting up some booby traps so no one would steal them or whatnot.

In The morning. I thought that other people should have a go at burying their stuff so I asked some others to help me make more caves so we dug and dug and dug...

And finally we finished. "Thank you everybody for your help" I told the people.

"You're welcome" they replied and walked back home.

"Everybody!" I shouted "we just made new caves for you guys to put your stuff in, so if you want to you can!" People started to stare and get stuff, and now people started to actually do it and my idea had worked!

Some caves were full by the end of the day.

"Can someone help find something to block people from taking the stuff people put in here?" People started to run in the windy and flaky weather.

After a few minutes, people were running up the hill. Rocks were flying everywhere as they ran and ran up the hill, they were carrying a velvet rope, protecting it as they ran, the golden metal was shining in the sunlight. Sweat was trickling off their forehead , they were tired and hot, I decided to go down and help them. I grabbed a side and we lifted it up and finally, we got it up the hill.

Then we went into the cave and saw...

Everything gone! All there was was traces of footsteps and

Someone running away! Someone went past the booby traps too! I started to follow the person. Once I caught up to the person ,I pulled off their mask and saw that she was a girl, she had blue eyes and long black, silky hair. I tried to get the sacks but the girl pulled it away and kept running away. I ran as fast as I could. I tried reaching the sacks but was just a millimeter away, I looked behind me and saw the others trying to catch up. I found a stick on the ground and picked it up. I used the stick to try and reach it but then it was too late, the bridge suddenly broke with a loud “SNAP!” But the girl jumped off right before it broke.

I remembered when me and my mom used to watch the Olympic pole vault event, they would use a pole and run then jump and they would see how long they could jump. I thought of doing it and thought it was a good idea,so , I walked back so I would have enough space to run then I started to run as fast as I could and then at the end, I used the pole and jumped I almost made it but, I was hanging on the corner of the ground. Rocks and soil were falling down and made a sudden thud noise. I climbed up and kept on running, the others passed me the stick and I caught it but it almost slipped out of my hand. I saw a few horses on the side and hopped on and started to ride it.

“today might be my lucky day!” I yelled in happiness.

“ Maybe not,” replied the girl. She started riding another horse. My horse went as fast as lightning and we charged as fast as we could. I used the stick to poke through the hole and carried it back to me.

Once I got back to the bridge I patted and left the horse and jumped back to the other side of the broken bridge.

“Hey guys can you come over and help unpack” I called them over and they came and helped. We unpacked everything and we did it all before tomorrow and before I needed to get back to my mom.

Finally, I returned home and went back to my mom and pretended that nothing like what actually happened, happened.

The next morning, I was thirsty, I drank some water, I saw the girl who tried to steal their possessions, I realized she was lonely like me, I decided that we could be friends. I walked up to her, and before I could say anything she said “I’m sorry for what I did”

“It’s okay,” I replied. “Want to be friends?” I asked. She shrugged, I took it as a yes.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Hong Kong International School, Yao, Brian – 9*

One day, Adrian and his friend James had a vacation from school. Their parents decided to go to the Mogao Grottoes for the week. Adrian had thought that caves wouldn't be much fun to visit but little did he know, the Mogao Grottoes were different. Their moms and dads had found a nice hotel in Duhang, and announced that tomorrow they would be visiting the Mogao Caves. When tomorrow came, Adrian found out that the Mogao Caves were a cool underground system of old Buddhist artifacts.

"I guess the Mogao Caves may not be as boring as I thought they were." Adrian thought.

When they came in, the tour guide said, "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I would like to make sure that none of you wander away, because these artifacts are priceless, and I would have to take responsibility if one of them broke."

But James, being James, whispered to Adrian, "Hey, Adrian, let's get out of here. I want to see one of the murals."

Adrian replied, "But James, didn't you hear what the tour guide said? We would be in big trouble if we got caught wandering away."

James stubbornly insisted, "C'mon, let's go!"

Adrian hesitated but at last acquiesced to James's request.

After they broke off the group, James said, "Okay, according to the guide map, murals should be a straight walk then a sharp right. Then, we should be able to see the mural of King Sibi, a king who was so kind he gave his entire body to a falcon to replace the flesh of a magical sparrow."

Adrian said, "That is very kind!"

So the kids walked forward for some time, but then, just as they were about to turn, James's watch vibrated. "Oh no! My mom told me that they just had a roll call and we weren't there! What are we going to do!?"

Adrian urgently replied, "Quick! Put your watch somewhere. It has a GPS tracker!" So they ran back, ran up some stairs, threw James's watch there, and hurried back to the mural of King Sibi

"Look, there's King Sibi!" James said.

"Also, there's the butcher that cut King Sibi's flesh!"

"And there's the scale used to weigh King Sibi flesh!"

Just as they were talking about King Sibi, they heard a *scratch-scratch* sound coming above them. They realized they weren't going to be alone in the room.

Adrian whispered, "James, what is that noise?"

James replied, "I don't know! Could it be the ghost of King Sibi?"

The *scratch-scratch* sound got louder. And louder. And then, "AHHHH!!!!" James and Adrian screamed.

The scratching stopped.

"Whew!" Adrian sighed.

"Wait a minute..." James said. "It says in the guide that in the old days, robbers would pillage rooms and take things, then sell them for money! It adds that sometimes in the present day, people will rob these rooms too, as the older they are, the more valuable they are."

"Could it be possible that the scratching was robbers trying to get in?" Adrian asked.

Meanwhile, Bart and Harry were up on the surface, figuring out how to rob the mural of King Sibi without alerting people.

Bart said, "Harry, I heard someone scream down there. That place is haunted!"

Harry said, "Well, I'm going to get that mural by hook or by crook!"

Bart said, "Fine! Whatever you do, I'm not going down there! You go by yourself."

So Harry began to dig again.

Back in the caves, James said to Adrian as they hid in a corner, "I bet that our parents are already searching far and wide for us. They'll probably be here in about five minutes!"

Then, the *scratch-scratch* began again.

“Shush!” Adrian shushed James. “My gut tells me that the scratching is coming from thieves, who are above us, planning to steal the mural! Also, my gut is almost always right!”

“But then what about the time when you said the ice cream store was north, but it ended up being east? You said that your gut told you it was north!”

“Shush! Listen!” Adrian said.

They heard voices above them. They seemed to be arguing over who would get the larger share of ... something...

Suddenly, a chunk of stone broke off from the ceiling. A ladder dropped down. Two men climbed down.

Adrian said, “I was right! There were robbers!”

This time it was James’s turn to shush Adrian. “Shhhh!”

“James? Adrian?” A worried voice shouted.

Then, 4 people walked through the doorway.

James saw both of their parents. James’s dad said, “And who might you two men be? Workers, trying to move the mural? Guide?”

The tour guide rushed through. “Yes?”

James’s dad said, “Are these men supposed to be here?”

The tour guide looked at them carefully. “Absolutely not! They’re robbers!” He grabbed his walkie-talkie and said, “HQ, I am in Cave 275. Robbers present! Send reinforcements!”

The robbers ran to the ladder, but it was already too late. Adrian’s dad had blocked them.

Not long after, the police came and secured the robbers inside the prison outside of the Grottoes.

Adrian said to his mom right as they were leaving, “Can we come here next time?”

Her mom replied, “Sure, honey, we sure can.”

# Lost in the Mogao Grottoes

*Hong Kong International School, Yu, Soohyun – 9*

“Bye mom!” I said before closing the door behind me. Oh, yeah, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is Ping, and I am 10 years old. I live in Beijing. Today I am going on a school trip to the Mogao Caves. When I arrived, I was in awe of the caves. There was a bit of a building built in the traditional Chinese style, which was built into the mountain. I assumed that behind it was the entrance to the caves.

When we entered the cave, there was a musty old smell lingering in the air. On the walls to the side of us were paintings that were almost fully dissolved into nothingness. I could barely make out a painting of a monk. I was in such awe of the paintings and statues that I didn’t notice that I got side stepped from the group and after a while, I stopped to look around me. I started to panic, and ran back the way I came. But it was no use. I was lost. But something stopped me in my tracks. It was a door, an old fashioned Chinese sliding door. I wondered what was on the other side. But what if it was not safe? I thought. Eventually, curiosity got over me and I opened the door. I don’t know what I was expecting, maybe some ancient monster or a room filled with treasures from the past. But whatever it was, this room wasn’t it. It looked like any other room. Many rooms away, stood a figure that looked human. It was probably a statue, I thought at first, but the thing was, it was moving! It was facing a Buddha statue and it seemed as if it was praying. Weird. Once again, curiosity controlled my actions and steered me towards this person. When I arrived, I noticed a few things. First, he was a boy not much older than me and was still praying and it would be rude to interrupt. Second, he was wearing old style clothing. Third, the paintings around him were suddenly in good condition. So I waited for him to finish and then said, “Excuse me?” He turned around to face me.

“Hello... who are you? Where did you come from?” he asked.

“It’s Ping Chan.” I replied.

“You can call me Hongbian.”

“Also, I came in through that door.” pointing to the door I came from.

“You came in through that door?!” He exclaimed, sounding surprised “Umm... that’s weird. But there’s no time to think about it. You need to get out of here, fast.”

“Why?” I asked.

“This part of the Mogao Grottoes is in danger of bandits. I can help you get out.” He walked towards the door. I followed. But when we got to the door, Hongbian could not open it. I tried but I couldn’t either. I was both confused and scared. Hongbian then told me that we could go to a wise man called Master Lu for help. Hongbian seemed like a smart boy. And he was. He talked on and on about all the treasures here, such as the first printed book in the world. He also described a type of magic called ‘long mo fa’ ( 龙魔法 ). He said that it could enchant, control, attack or be used as defense on anyone or anything. I didn’t believe him until we came to a room where a very, very old man was meditating. As soon as we stepped into the room, he opened his eyes and smiled with wrinkly eyes. Hongbian introduced me to Master Lu. Hongbian explained the problem with the door.

Master Lu nodded and said, “I know how you can open the door. You must go to Master Fen. She holds the key, but you also must give something in return. Like the Ring of Light that is heavily guarded with bandits. We can start by enchanting the knife in your backpack.” I had no idea how he knew about that, but I did hand him the small knife for lunch. He took it with both hands and whispered some words I couldn’t hear. After a few seconds, the small knife grew in size to become a sharp, long sword. He handed it to me.

Did he expect me to handle this?

“Go to the end chamber. Bandits are approaching from there and that is also where the ring is. Good luck.” Master Lu handed us a map. We followed the map and after a while, we stood at the end chamber. I held my sword tight and Hongbian pulled out a dagger I didn’t even notice he had. After a bit of walking I saw it: the Ring of Light. But it was heavily guarded. Hongbian whispered a simple battle plan in my ear. He would distract the bandits while I took the ring. So it worked. He approached the bandits and said a few things I didn’t hear, and the bandits charged after him. I came out of my hidey place and, with all my strength, slashed through the glass case and grabbed the ring. I put it into my pocket and darted

off to help Hongbian. I surprised the bandits with a few thrusts of my sword as well. Finally, we got away from the bandits and I was surprised I didn't have a scratch. We made the deal with Master Fen, who gave us the key. It finally opened. Just when I was about to leave, I mouthed thank you to Hongbian and was gone. When I stepped out, my sword shrank back to a knife. On the other side of the door, a school tour was still going on. When I was back with my school group, they thought I had been gone for only a minute, which surprised me. What an amazing adventure that was!

# The Vision of the Mogao Buddha

*Island Christian Academy, Arai, Milan – 10*

Legend says, a young monk named Yuezun had a strange vision in the Gobi Desert in Dunhuang. This legend had happened in 366 C.E. When Yuezun laid on an oasis, he had a vision of one thousand Buddhas gazing at him. He was blinded by the glory of the Buddhas lined up symmetrically and glanced from Buddha to Buddha with glowing eyes. Although they did not do or say anything, he could feel the greatness of their souls. Yuezun knew he had to worship them for their superiority.

The Buddhas wanted a cave, which had millions of unique murals, paintings, and statues to represent their memorable importance. Before long, other monks had arrived at that oasis and had the same vision. For years, they built the cave and painted the walls of the Mogao Grottoes. After they worked hard, the caves were full of magnificent or even exquisite paintings and statues detailedly carved by the tireless monks. They dedicated themselves to pursue higher wisdom through their compassion. At that moment, their visions became a reality and the paintings the monks had designed were the most noble Buddhist art in the world. This is the legend my mother had told me.

Out in this dry, barren desert, I was running away from home. My mother had died after I turned five, and my father was extremely ill. However, since my family are the leaders of Xining, I must go to war myself. Still, if I even tried to go, dread would sweep through me like a tidal wave. I knew that if I had escaped, I could live the life I've wanted. But I didn't know that this journey would change my entire life...

I sprinted through the scorching desert, the aggressive sandstorm invaded the whole horizon. Covering my mouth, I struggled to take each step without getting dragged by the murderous storm. My long, silky black hair drenched in sweat. The blazing desert was baked by day and frosty by night. I was in a boiling valley full of rocky hills and coarse, rusty sand. I could almost taste the heat of the desert. The wild wind howled ferociously whilst the reckless sand tried to shove me away. My heart pounded, I felt as if my entire body was numb, paralyzed. Cold sweat trickled down my back, my pulse started to race. I wanted to go home. Yet, my instincts screamed to me to continue. I fought back the urge of anxiety as I desperately tried to find a shelter for the night.

Still sick in the stomach, I kept walking. Out of nowhere, the merciless sandstorm uncovered something. It shimmered in the sunlight, and I could make out buildings in various sizes. Of dunes there were none, only a long, wall-like stretch of sandy foot-hills stretching away to a hazy distance eastwards. The grottoes were covered in luxuriance. It was the Mogao Cave. Some may describe these dwellings as odd or unfamiliar. However, to me it felt like I knew my mother was right beside me.

A drop of tear slowly dripped down my face. My pulse had stopped racing. Instead, my face softened, and I noticed that the sandstorm had gone away. The gentle breeze tickled my cheeks as I gazed silently at the cave. I thought back to the prominent legend my mother had told me, ricocheting in my mind. I suddenly felt weak after the long hike. Even so, I stepped into the cave.

It was pitch-black and far from empty. Although they were clearly ancient, they were filled with heavenly, artistic murals all preserved in these forgotten rooms. I walked around the place to find a Buddha, but it was nowhere to be found. Moreover, I felt nauseous. Colours started to fade. I couldn't take it anymore. And that's when it happened. I—

It was silent. I felt cold as if I were in a mystical heaven. Like a dream. I didn't know where I was or who brought me here—.

“Ju,”

I let out a gasp. I was startled by this voice. It wasn't a voice I could recognize. Not my dad, and obviously not my mum.

“Ye... yes?” I spoke. My heart missing a beat, thoughts of consequences urged me on. Was I in trouble? Did I do something wrong?

“Can I... help you?”

The voice did not reply, which made shivers tore down my spine and rack my body. I clenched my fists and I tensed my body tight. Then finally I heard something.

“You need help,” the voice said.

I suddenly released the tensions and slowly turned my head to reveal the voice. I expected a person but no, it was not. I saw something twinkling in the dim light. Something magnificent. With a closer look, it was no other than a Buddha. The dignified serenity of its features, the simple yet impressive gestures, the grateful richness of its folds. Just perfection! I quickly kneeled down onto my knees and bowed.

“How do you know me?” I asked.

“I have been watching your whole journey here,” the Buddha replied.

A look of puzzlement spread across my face, as my eyes bulged out of my head.

“Follow this spirit, and you will find a solution,” said the Buddha.

I took a glance at it. It was so whimsical, delightful, and humble. It started to move in different directions.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

A few moments later, I saw a tiny speck of colour. There were paintings of... me.

I glanced at every painting on the wall. They were all so beautiful and so... familiar

“Your mother painted these before you were born,” the spirit said.

“What?” I said, astonished. “But how?”

“She often came to this cave and wondered about one blank wall. After years, she finally decided to paint on it. She was in the same situation you are in now when she was young, and she wanted to paint the whole story of the war so that you won't make the same mistake as her,” the spirit explained.

All the facts raced through my mind.

I looked carefully at each painting. Then I finally realised.

“Her people suffered because she ran away?” I guessed.

“Precisely,” the spirit replied.

I let out a long sigh, “What have I done?” I said to myself. “Thank y—.”

The spirit had vanished. I gasped.

Suddenly, I felt everything coming back to me. A drop of water fell onto my face. Was this all a dream? A vision? Then I remembered everything that happened.

Strong confidence ran through my body. I was the only one who could lead my city and not let my people suffer. My selfishness was going to destroy my citizens. This was my chance, (my only chance) to save Xinging.

I took a deep breath and stepped out of the cave.

# Meeting A Buddha

*Island Christian Academy, Chan, Avelin – 10*

The winds howled savagely. Sand dunes were towering over the Mogao Grottoes, blocking the blistering rays of the sun. Some tried to journey on, and others cowardly quitted. Yet, Arya saw adventure! Although she knew she might not make it, at least she would try. But her Dad wouldn't allow it. Honestly, there were so many hidden things and mysteries waiting to be uncovered! The only adventures she went on were the ones Dad told her about. Her favourite was the Red Stone. A legend about an enchanted stone that would fix everything with its power. But never mind that. It wasn't real.

Obviously.

If it was, it would already be discovered by someone else.

She knew she would never be able to set foot outside the caves. Not under Papa's watch anyway. Arya thought her Papa's rules were like a giant wall, blocking her from all the things happening around the world. She hated the caves.

When Arya was younger, her Dad told her that the Grottoes were the safest place in all of Dunhuang, but Arya wasn't looking for a safe place to stay. She wasn't looking for a buddha to paint, she wasn't looking for a stove to cook on, she wasn't looking for floors to sweep. She was looking for an adventure! She had spent the first 11 years of her life living in the grottoes. And Arya was dying to know when she could finally leave this place. Arya longed to be an explorer! One that would become a hero.

"Hey Ari, why that dull face?" asked her Dad, walking in.

"Leave me **alone**," sighed Arya.

"Why should I?"

"Because, Mom would!" she snapped, shooting a blistering look at her dad.

Her Dad let out a sigh. "Ari, I know, your mother——"

Suddenly a soldier came running out.

"General! There's enemies outside the Caves!" he cried

"Soldier Xiyu, how did this happen?" Arya's Dad cried

"I don't know, one second it was all sand, the next moment, they already appeared! We're overrun, Sir! If you don't come out now, our men will not be able to defend the grottoes.

"I'll get there in a second."

Soldier Xiyu bowed his head with respect and rushed off. Arya's Dad turned to her.

"Ari, listen. I want you to find a safe place to hide. Run. Now!" he urged desperately.

Before long, Arya found herself running into a room. Dust was dancing everywhere. The room was almost empty, only a few cobwebs and holes decorated the walls. A carpet laid on the floor and Arya stepped on it. Suddenly, she tumbled down the tunnel and landed on hard ground. Then she realised. This carpet was a tunnel that led down to a cave! A *secret* cave.

“Hello? Anyone here?” she echoed.

Silence.

She sat on the ground, blinded. Then, out of the corner of her eye, a small gleam ignited the dark scene. She looked around her. *Was the light coming from a candle? Maybe she could use the candle to find a way to get out!* Nervously, Arya followed the dot of light. As she moved nearer, the light seemed to fade a little. Then she stepped on something fluffy. A earsplitting yowl broke the silence. Arya froze. *What was that?!* She turned her head to the direction of the light. It was completely gone by now.

“That’s weird,” she muttered. “I could’ve sworn that I saw that light shining somewhere.”

Blindly, she stuck out her two hands to find out what she stepped on. She felt something wooden and something that seemed like a... furball. Suddenly, a sharp glow pierced her eyes. Arya jerked her head away. Slowly, she turned it back. *Oh! So the light didn’t come from a candle.* It came from an old wooden box and next to it sat a sand cat! The cat circled around Arya as she opened the box. Suddenly, eerie, magical mist came pouring out of the box and a buddha made of rock appeared. Its chest was rising and falling, as if it had lungs and an actual heart. But, certainly it had to be her imagination. Obviously. Maybe the darkness was already making her go crazy. Arya rubbed her eyes and shook her head twice, just to be sure. When she opened them, She saw a *giant* toe. Arya looked up. The buddha was five times as tall as Arya now! Its stone-like body seemed even more human-like now. Its skin seemed to be shining like the rays of the sun and a mystical sensation seemed to surround it.

Arya fell to her knees and began coughing up all the things that were respectful to a Buddha

“O great buddha—erm, it is a pleasure—uh... no, *honour* to meet you.” she said, struggling to remember.

“Arya,” boomed the buddha. “I see you have some troubles going on in your mind. Let me take you out of this secret cave and go back into your reality.”

With a flash of light, Arya, the sand cat and the buddha disappeared.

They appeared on the battlefield, as Arya stepped on the bloodstained ground, she heard the buddha’s voice ringing in her ears.

“Arya, take this sword, find the red stone and plunge the sword in its heart. Then all your troubles and this battle will end.

Arya nodded and a golden sword fell in her hands. Arya dodged, dived and ducked everything with her sand cat padding behind her. She saw a big, red stone through the clearing! It was old and rusty. *Wait, wasn’t that the red stone that appeared in Papa’s stories? How on earth did it appear here*

“Oh well,” she breathed and clutched the sword tightly.

Arya’s legs ran as fast as they could and she plunged the sword into the stone. Beads of sweat trickled down her cheeks. Suddenly, all the enemies started fading away.

The soldiers started murmuring. “What happened?”

As her father limped up to her, Arya smiled.

“A...Ari! What happened? How did they all fade?”

She smiled, “He did all this. The Buddha. You should thank him. Not me.

Her Dad hugged Arya tightly.

“I...I can't believe it, you stopped the battle! As a reward, I think... I think you should be free to journey wherever you want to go from now on.”

Arya hugged her Dad back. "Thank you!" she whispered.

"Three cheers for Arya! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray! Hip hip hooray!" cried out the soldiers.

Arya grinned. She had never felt happier in her life.

Then on the highest floor of the caves, a buddha sat there calmly and smiled, his magic had worked. Peace was fulfilled to his people. No more fighting, no more killing. His job was done. And then the buddha started to fade away into shining pieces of golden sand, accompanied by a gust of magical wind, flying towards the setting sun.

# Going Away

*Island Christian Academy, Chu, Kasley – 10*

“No! I don’t need your help, I can do it myself!” shouted Yuanlu.

“What happens when you get lost?!” said Yuanlus’s mother. He always had a cheerful face. But then, he stormed out of the living room and went to his room throwing his pillows out of his bed. There was a knock on the door. *Knock knock*. Yuanlu went to his door standing beside it. “Come on, sorry. I just don’t think you’re independent!” said his mom.

Tears drenched his face. He was torn by the fact that his mother did not think he was responsible. If he would even say a word, his eyes would swell up with tears.

‘Go... I promise...’ Yuanlu heard a voice that was not his mother’s. It was too deep of a voice to be his mother. He heard it outside slowly fading away.

Then he walked outside and he opened the door. Instantly, his face turned pale. Shivers ran across his body. The cold breeze made him white, almost paralyzed. He quickly wiped his tears while still sobbing. He was devastated. The lights turned off. It was 12:00 pm. Owls were howling, a bus went by and a gigantic—grey fog swept by. The lights were flickering at the front porch, little drops of water fell down making a silent splash on the hard stone.

## Chapter 2

As he was walking, he found a bus station. There were bats staring into his soul. There was a dark alleyway right beside the station. He stared at the rustic clock. He could hear the tick every second. He sighed. The lights were going to turn off in 10 minutes, the sign said. He saw a bus waiting for him, so he entered.

“Where am I going?” he asked the bus driver while looking around. The driver stood silent. It was noiseless. Yuanlu was somewhat affected by the slow chirps of the crickets in the bushes.

“We’re here in Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Gansu, China,” said the driver.

“No WAY!!” shouted Yuanlu. It was his dream place to visit. He would fight with his mom just about going.

Yuanlu had never been here. He didn’t recognize it, but somehow he found a map. A strange guy gave it to him and he asked, “Where are you going?” in mandarin while giving more maps out.

“Uhm I’m going to Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Gansu” replied Yuanlu.

He was frightened and then he ran away. The guy who gave him a map shrugged.

“Good luck!” shouted the man. Yuanlu ran as fast as he could. He was running away from the newspaper guy chasing him. his heart was pounding, his heart rate rose and he thought to himself, what if it would happen? He quickly erased the thought from his mind and ran as fast as he could as if someone was chasing him.

He sat down while he was out of breath. Sweat was dripping down him.

He sat up from his chair and started walking to the rental camel shop.

Yuanlu rented a camel and rode it to the desert. It turned to night, the wind was howling, you could hear it swaying all around. Suddenly, a gigantic sand storm blew, it was golden—colored. The sand was everywhere like it was a sea. He tried to find cover but he failed. His hand was covered in a cold sweat. Sand kept on blasting powerfully like it was murderous.

## Chapter 3

He woke up feeling sick and dizzy. He wondered to himself, what happened? Then he got up and looked around. “Where am I?” He saw multiple doors wondering which one to go into. All the doors were red. They were laid out in a straight way. He walked inside, dread crept around his body. He found a flashlight on the floor. He wondered if someone was here before him. Yuanlu thought that it seemed like the person ran away leaving their flashlight on the floor. He looked, already feeling the horror. Then he walked away, disappearing into the darkness.

He turned it on and off because it was not working. The walls were stone—like but at the same time, they felt like mud. Paintings were surrounded by him. They were laid out like a forset, massive amounts of buddhas. If you would touch them it would be hard as a rock and cold as an ice cube. The texture was rough, it had tiny holes that would make a bad texture. He was 14 so he could understand the paintings. Yuanlu didn’t want to go that far but then he

looked back. He had a feeling that he should go deeper... Then he followed his guts and took a big gulp. "Okay, I can do this!" He still went even when his heart screamed no. Horror struck him. He stopped. He had a feeling he was going to regret this. He promised not to go but he disobeyed his mother and left.

He kept looking around, Yuanlu thought he was going in circles but he didn't realize that he just kept ongoing. He brought an axe in case. He ripped open paintings. Yuanlu had found something shocking...

## Chapter 4

It was a library. The walls were moldy, and it was dark. The library was filled with documents and other stuff. There were about 1,100 scrolls and 15,000 books that were written with very little information. Yuanlu kept on digging and coughing suffering to go further. Then he found something, a book which was the oldest book in the world (diamond sutra) The pages were ripped into different pieces. After he held it he felt a shortness of breath, his heart was pounding and he almost couldn't breathe... He felt an urge to get out, he ran but it was too big...he couldn't get out. Then he fainted on the floor.

He woke up and started looking "Where is it?!" shouted Yuanlu. He thought the buddhas could help him, but it was just his imagination. The buddhas glared at him. Yuanlu jumped in surprise. He tried to talk to them but they sounded like they were just mumbling. "How can I get out?" asked Yuanlu. Then there was not a single sound.

"Left," said buddha.

Yuanlu gasped. "Any more?" asked Yuanlu. He wondered if he should just keep on going left.

"But should I?" asked Yuanlu, "Okay then!"

He thought saw the same tunnel, the one where there was a blackness that never ended. He entered. Yuanlu woke up on the side of the street on the walkway. Yuanlu's mother saw him and rushed and started sobbing out like she had lost someone. He woke up, brightness flashed into his eyes. 'Mom?!' said Yuanlu.

'Yes it's me!!!!' said his mom.

Yuanlu walked into their home crying to his mom while apologizing. He learned to be independent and trust his mom.

# Invasion of the Cave

*Island Christian Academy, Eyres, Paxton – 10*

It was the last day of the school year, Luke and Ella Foxin were just saying their goodbyes when dad showed up with exhilarating news. “Hey guess we need to get to the plane, I’ve packed up already, hurry up!!” Dad said with excitement as he pushed through the crowds of hugs and kisses.

“Say what???” springed Luke.

“We’re hedging for the gobi, besides you’ll make new friends at lightning speed.” Dad added, hoping for the best response from his children.

The children hopped on the plane yet again expecting different for the journey. As well as that it was long and the boardman seemed to spread for miles but Dad’s new invention was worth the fall for it was to an answer to prayer, you see it was a gadget of the heavens, it was a water bottle that could generate water out of the condensation in the air.

“Where are we?” asked Ella as she watched the sand flow pass the side of the jeep blocking the nearly impenetrable glow off the horizon hours later.

“Well we’re at our new home.” replied dad.

“Wu...wu-wu-wate, that’s our new home!!?” Luke excitedly questioned as he astonishingly guessed upon the oasis of a mansion in the middle of the desert.

“O, right that’s the gift from the Chinese government for letting them be the sponsor of the amazing water bottle.” answered dad.

## Chapter 2: The mansion

As soon as they entered the dazzling mansion they began to make their acquaintance with their servants and maids. But suddenly dad’s phone began to ring. “Hello sir, Mr. Foxin speaking.....ok.....ya...all of them?....ok.” he hung up. “Alright guys, it looks like I need to go to an urgent meeting but John will look after you.” Dad continued and winked at John.

“All right lads we’ve got, we have a lot to do and I might as well take you someplace special.” added John.

“Ok fine with us dad,” replied Ella.

“Same here dad, off to your meeting.” announced Luke and off they went.

## Chapter 3: The cave

John led the children to their room. “Here it is, your room but I’m taking you guys somewhere else so put your stuff down so we can go.” John told the children and so they did.

Soon the children found themselves in the Jeep once more. “So were we headed?” Asked Ella

“Well I’m not Chinese.” responded John

“So?” cried Ella

“Well me and my brother Joe (the diver) are Israeli and we are the descendants of Mary, Joseph and Jesus.” stated John

“And would you like to meet the others?” asked Joe

The jeep pulled up to a certain rock formation with a small opening. “Here we are.” said John

The group approached the cave and after a while of searching through it they found a village of people living amongst the grottos hiding behind shadow of the polarising art of the monks. The people were set into tribes by either descendants of Jesus or versus disciples. The village had what seemed to be a magnificently clean water supply which roamed the cave full of endless miles cave to discover.

## Chapter 4: Descendants of the holy sceptre

For the rest of the day the children introduce themselves to the hidden city hiding from the monks of the Mogao caves. The people of the cave knew the truth of Jesus, loyal to it and so Luke and Ella would too.

It was around 6pm when John gathered the children. “We must go now, but we may return tomorrow with supplies for the village.”

So suddenly while the party left the cave a monk spy watched and reported the sight to his leader. But by mistake trespassed against the group of monkeys by mentioning god's name and was killed before he could tell the leader the location of the city. Thus a spy from the city called Conner killed them all and covered the gap between the caves of the monks.

Followed by the treacherous decision of Conner the monks in rage killed Dad and all the servants who had come with him.

Soon it was time to return as promised by John yet when the children retired part of the city had already been executed. “What has happened?” John and Joe continuously asked the people until finally their sister J.C. told them of the story. “Conner was rejected and executed by the city last night and so was mother and father for they believed in forgiveness, but of course only the elderly were included for the vote and even the entire descendants of St. Thomas were included too.

“Oh my we must go and inherit the invention or else the Chinese will!” exclaimed Ella.

### **Chapter 5: End but yet the beginning**

The children did just that after 20 years past and they eventually opened it to the public sponsored by the villages profit. And as for the city it became a museum of biblical history founded by John and Joe. As for the people of the cave they would soon find themselves in refuge hiding amongst the world scattered throw out it.

However the monks blinded with rage, trapped because Conner closed the hatch managed to infiltrate the museum and eventually after thriving through the caves now hunt the people still waiting for revenge on the descendants of Jesus.

# The Historical World of the 1000 Buddhas

*Island Christian Academy, Laight, Joshua – 11*

The glorious sunshine from the towering sun glazed upon the Mogao Grottoes, like a god shining its cleansing eyes. A monk called Le Zun saw this beautiful sight. It cured his mind from the dark spirits hunting him. In this moment of clarity, he received the divine inspiration from the mystical buddhas that had appeared to him...

It was once just a barren cliff with arid and dense layers of sand and above it a bone dry top, as a result a monk called Le Zun forged and shaped the mystical Mogao Grottoes because it was his destiny to do so. The one thousand buddhas inspired him to save the barren cliffs from its misery. Therefore, the mostly dry be grottoes were, I had thought of the amazing statues and majestic paintings inside the Mogao Grottoes but the first challenge of getting to the Mogao Grottoes is getting through the Gobi Desert, the harshest desert in all of China where the winds are the strongest and the sandstorms are barbarous and deadly.

After I had arrived at northwest China by boat and train, I borrowed some camels from the locals, then when I got my stuff ready I had setted of on my journey to the Mogao Grottoes. Then I had reached the desert so far there were no sandstorms but since it was night it could get pretty cold. Luckily I had brought a thick jumper to keep me warm otherwise I would have frozen to death.

Halfway through the desert just a few more miles until the Mogao Grottoes, a humongous sandstorm, which was as hot as a raging furnace and could stretch the whole desert with its furious, impenetrable sea of wind and could blast anything in its trail, hit me! I had to hide behind a huge boulder so that I wouldn't be covered with sand or get blown away.

Whilst I was stuck in a sand storm behind a huge boulder, I drank some water trying to wait out the storm. Then after twenty minutes of waiting around I had got tired of waiting so I chose to go out and fight the storm. It was tiring but I had made it to the Mogao Grottoes!

Once I had arrived at the outstanding mogao Grottoes it had seemed still intact after 1500 years of its presence. I wonder how they made the grotto still smooth and pure after so long. Its walls were rocky and jagged.

Then when I went inside the Mogao Grottoes it was filled with purifying painting, the colours really fitted all of the paintings in the Mogao Grottoes. Then There was a room that had lots of buddhas and ... wow! The room had a gigantic and towering buddha. It was the height of the whole grotto but ... all of a sudden the ground started shaking, I had seen the gigantic buddha move one of its hands ... Am I dreaming? Out of nowhere the buddha's other hand had started to move, after that the hands started to chase me as if they were trying to grab me so I had no choice but to ... run!

As I was running to the exits, all of a sudden all of the exits had got blocked off because of all of the rubble that had fallen from the walls and ceilings from the shaking of the ginormous buddha ... I was trapped! I had nowhere to go!

When I had gotten stuck in the room with the ginormous buddha it grabbed me I was shocked with fear. Will it kill me?! A shiver had come down my spine. What were the possibilities of what the ginormous buddha will do to me? I had to do something but ...I was too late, a stone door had opened up out of nowhere, is this a corridor that the ginormous buddha will send me to?

Then the ginormous buddha placed me inside the hidden corridor, so I walked forwards into the corridor and all of a sudden the stone wall started to close up behind me! I guess I will have to find another way out of this grotto. Once I had walked for about 5 minutes I saw a door straight ahead

of me so I rushed towards the door so then I could open the door and see what was behind it's remains.

Once I had reached the door I tried opening it but I was not able to open it! So I tried again and again and again and then the door opened so I peeked inside and saw ... A tsunami of old documents! The room was stacked with old documents. There were the oldest books in here, like no other mysterious hidden room! I could make a fortune with all of these documents! So there I took them... I was filled with greed. I'm so very sorry ... I had to.

After I had taken the old documents I tried to find an exit out of there but this whole room was ginormous. I couldn't see an exit anywhere. I was doomed! Then in the corner of my eye I saw the desert sunlight so I rushed to see what was on my left and you wouldn't believe what I had seen ... It was Le Zun but he seemed different... he was almost transparent like a glass of water and his skin was as pale as a marble floor but looked like it was made of leather. Surrounding him was a colourful ghastly presence just like paintings. His hands were lifeless and dead, his movement was as still as a statue. It seems like his ghostly presence still roames this place. He was even kind enough to help me get out of the Mogao Grottoes.

As I had came out of the grotto from a secret exit in the room with old documents I wanted to say thank you to Le Zun for helping me get out but as I looked behind me he was gone! He mysteriously disappeared. Was he a ghost?! I couldn't believe what my eyes saw. Was I just hallucinating or did I just find the exit? I don't know but at least I had gotten out of the Mogao Grottoes.

The desert sky was the colour of the ocean, right after a storm. Sweat was dripping off my eyelashes. I thought that in the desert, you might have a higher chance of finding something valuable, but all this journey brought was pain and regret.

Once I went far enough, I pulled out my metal detector from my bag and started my search. After an hour or so, my metal detector started beeping like crazy! I got extremely excited, I had finally found something! I pulled out my shovel and started digging.

Soon I realized the object was way too big for me to dig out alone, so I called some digger people. A few weeks went by, and I came back to the dig place and I saw that the digger people finally finished digging! A giant broken castle! I was extremely excited, so I called my friends, Brooklyn, Brayden, and Cecilia. they were heading over now, I was really looking forward to seeing what was in it. When my friends came, they were amazed by what I had discovered.

“Wow! You really discovered this!?”

“Yeah!” I replied, “I did!”

“What's inside?” said Brayden.

“I have no idea.” I Replied

“Then let's explore it!!” Shouted Brayden.

“Uh, guys,” Cecilia said nervously, I'm not sure this is sa—

“It will be fine Cecilia!” Brooklyn interrupted.

I tied a string to a rock outside.

“What's that for?” Brooklyn asked.

“In case we get lost,” I replied, we can follow the string!

“Ohhh smart!” Brooklyn replied.

Me and my friends entered the cave. It was dark, but luckily I brought a flashlight. In a few seconds, the cave opening shut behind us, making the ground shake. Then a scuttling noise emerged from the darkness of the cave. We huddled together, I was waving my flashlight all over to try and find the source of the sound.

“I knew this was a bad idea!” Whispered Cecilia. The sound became louder and louder, closer and closer, until it unexpectedly came to a halt. Then we were suddenly sprayed with lukewarm water

I shone the flashlight at all of my friends to make sure they were safe, the lukewarm water was actually blood, and Brayden’s head had been sliced clean off! All of us that were left screamed and ran from the horrid bloody scene, until we made it to another room in this nightmarish cave. What could have done this!? I asked myself. After a few seconds, we heard a sound echo through the caves, it sounded like an insect eating. Maybe whatever killed Brayden was cleaning up the remnants of his dead body. I slowly and quietly pointed my flashlight near the creature. I didn't get a clear view, but I saw that it was extremely large and hairy.

“What is that?” Cecilia asked, her eyes full of tears

“Probably the monster that did the murder” I replied

I shone the flashlight closer to the creature, but it noticed us quickly, it ran to us, letting out an ear piercing scream through its bloody jaws, we just barely escaped the monster, we soon made our way to another room, this one bigger than the other. It smelled like fresh blood.

“That was a spider!! Brooklyn whispered, A giant one too. It's a giant enemy spider!

“We are stuck in here!! What do we do?!” whispered Cecilia,

“We gotta get out of here.” I said

Brooklyn replied; “But how?!”

“We have to sneak past the spider,” I said, “then figure out how to open or find any door that leads us out of this thing.”

# The Murderous Creature of the undergrowned grottoes

*Island Christian Academy, Lee, Kiera – 10*

The desert sky was the colour of the ocean, right after a storm. Sweat was dripping off my eyelashes. I thought that in the desert, you might have a higher chance of finding something valuable, but all this journey brought was pain and regret.

Once I went far enough, I pulled out my metal detector from my bag and started my search. After an hour or so, my metal detector started beeping like crazy! I got extremely excited, I had finally found something! I pulled out my shovel and started digging.

Soon I realized the object was way too big for me to dig out alone, so I called some digger people. A few weeks went by, and I came back to the dig place and I saw that the digger people finally finished digging! A giant broken castle! I was extremely excited, so I called my friends, Brooklyn, Brayden, and Cecilia. they were heading over now, I was really looking forward to seeing what was in it. When my friends came, they were amazed by what I had discovered.

“Wow! You really discovered this!?”

“Yeah!” I replied, “I did!”

“What's inside?” said Brayden.

“I have no idea.” I Replied

“Then let's explore it!!” Shouted Brayden.

“Uh, guys,” Cecilia said nervously, I'm not sure this is sa—

“It will be fine Cecilia!” Brooklyn interrupted.

I tied a string to a rock outside.

“What's that for?” Brooklyn asked.

“In case we get lost,” I replied, we can follow the string!

“Ohhh smart!” Brooklyn replied.

Me and my friends entered the cave. It was dark, but luckily I brought a flashlight. In a few seconds, the cave opening shut behind us, making the ground shake. Then a scuttling noise emerged from the darkness of the cave. We huddled together, I was waving my flashlight all over to try and find the source of the sound.

“I knew this was a bad idea!” Whispered Cecilia. The sound became louder and louder, closer and closer, until it unexpectedly came to a halt. Then we were suddenly sprayed with lukewarm water

I shone the flashlight at all of my friends to make sure they were safe, the lukewarm water was actually blood, and Brayden's head had been sliced clean off! All of us that were left screamed and ran from the horrid bloody scene, until we made it to another room in this nightmarish cave. What could have done this!? I asked myself. After a few seconds, we heard a sound echo through the caves, it sounded like an insect eating. Maybe whatever killed Brayden was cleaning up the remnants of his dead body. I slowly and quietly pointed my flashlight near the creature. I didn't get a clear view, but I saw that it was extremely large and hairy.

“What is that?” Cecilia asked, her eyes full of tears

“Probably the monster that did the murder” I replied

I shone the flashlight closer to the creature, but it noticed us quickly, it ran to us, letting out an ear piercing scream through its bloody jaws, we just barely escaped the monster, we soon made our way to another room, this one bigger than the other. It smelled like fresh blood.

“That was a spider!! Brooklyn whispered, A giant one too. It's a giant enemy spider!

“We are stuck in here!! What do we do?!” whispered Cecilia,

“We gotta get out of here.” I said

Brooklyn replied; “But how?!”

“We have to sneak past the spider,” I said, “then figure out how to open or find any door that leads us out of this thing.”

# Discovery of the Mogao Grottoes

*Island Christian Academy, Omoto, Yuna – 10*

Marc Aruel Stein — a young, determined explorer — knew he had to be the first one to discover the Mogao Grottoes. Although many feared searching for it, he was filled with confidence. He had heard about the mystical legends; massive, golden-hued body buddhas; and the beautiful, ancient paintings on the wall with history hidden inside it. Even though many did not think of going there for thousands of years, he had made up his mind. He chose to go. He chose to go because he knew... He knew that there were many exquisite treasures of a time long forgotten longing to be uncovered...

The mellow sun rose over the horizon heating up the Gobi desert. The heat made sweat run down Stein's body. Wind blew against his face as he rode his camel along the barren desert in search of the Mogao Grottoes. Ferocious wind blew day and night causing a storm of sand. Yet Stein had a beaming smile on his face.

The cave was nowhere to be found. Everything around him were dunes and huge cliffs of sand. There was nothing. Since it was too dark to go back, he chose to stay in the desert. He covered himself in a large, warm blanket, opened his mouth wide in a gaping yawn and dozed off.

The next morning when he was wandering around the desert, which shimmered in the blazing heat, he heard some mysterious voice. "Who's there? What's up? Why are you here?" The voice got louder and louder as the mysterious creature got closer every single second.

Stein's throat was dry and tight; cold sweat poured down his body. He was almost paralyzed with fear. "Who are you? Do you know where the Mogao Caves are?" he asked cautiously— a shiver ran down his spine.

"I am Wang Yuanlu," replied the man, "The Mogao Caves... Since nobody entered it for thousands of years, it may be covered in sand. But if you keep digging, you may find it."

"That is the information I was looking for this whole entire time! Thank you so much for telling me. I hope you will have an amazing day!" Stein thanked him and Wang Yuanlu walked away. Whilst the wind, which formed a tempest of sand, blew day and night, Stein kept digging and digging. The sand was shining as if it were washed by gold. Although the wind covered what he had dug, he didn't think of giving up. He kept digging. Nothing was going to stop him now.

After a few days of digging, he finally found the entrance to the cave. His face lit up in a huge, broad grin. First, he took a time to stroll around the cave. On the walls, there were ancient paintings everywhere. Although the color of the paintings had faded, it was still magnificent. There were over a thousand hand carved buddhas. It shined in the sunlight that entered from the windows on the wall. When he entered one of the rooms, there were buddhas that were about twenty meters tall, standing tall and proud. He inspected the art and the buddhas for hours to find out the history and story each piece told. He chose to take some of the small, lightest, traditional painted buddhas, which were easy to carry, back to his home country, England, to show it to everyone.

A couple of days later when he was smoking where it seemed that no caves were at the back, the black smoke made a tiny hole in the sand. He put his eye near the hole to find out what was behind it. It took him a moment or two to realize that he found a brand new cave, which had been abandoned for thousands of years. He removed the sand away from the mysterious cave. When he got into the grotto, he worked out that it was a cave like a library. There were thousands of documents and forgotten scrolls. In addition, there were few beautiful painted buddhas, ancient manuscripts, huge, color faded silk banners, colorful embroidery and other rare textiles, which no one had ever seen. He found one document that he found that it was one of the oldest written documents in the world: the Diamond Sutra. He studied all the documents very carefully and held it gently so that they wouldn't be ruined. He took almost all of the documents, cautiously putting them inside his bag.

When it was time to say goodbye and travel back to Europe, tears welled up in his eyes. He felt like he wanted to stay in the Mogao Grottoes forever. But there was no choice. But instead, he's face was lit up in a wide smile, very exhilarated to show his great discovery of the Mogao Grottoes and to show the amazing hand-carved buddhas, scrolls and documents. He carried his bag, which was filled with treasures and looked back at the grottoes, which

showed him the most amazing thing he had ever seen. He hopped on his camel. Slowly, the camel started walking on the golden sand. Stein had left the Gobi desert.

Currently, the scroll, documents and a few small buddhas, that Stein found, are shown in the British Museum. People from everywhere in the world come to the museum to see the great discovery of Stein. However some people believe that those treasures should have remained in the Mogao Grottoes and question Stein's choice to take them. What do you think about it?

# The Boy and his Wolf

*Island Christian Academy, Pang, Andrew – 10*

The bullet fired out of the barrel. Seven dead wolves lay on the dusty, loose ground. “Pack #13 down. I repeat. Pack #13 down.”

Pack 13 was home to eight valiant wolves—now to one. That ‘one’ lay in a cave in the Mogao Grottoes. The cave was previously filled with sounds of laughter—now filled with an eerie silence. What would he do? The fire in his legs drew him to the opening like unwavering moths to a light.

A small boy stood outside. His father had told him to stay there while he hunted for nasty wolves. Food stood in his right hand, a bone in his left. Suddenly, a tiny creature emerged from the cave. Half starved, it gracefully climbed on his lap. He fed it his food.

Love At first sight.

A booming voice approached the cavern. Father disapproved of any creature, let alone a small wolf. Quickly he hid the resting refugee in his cloak.

“What are you hiding?” Boomed Father.

“Nothing Father,” replied the boy.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah”

“Are you really sure”

“Absolutely sure”

“Well let’s get back home anyways”

As they approached the Yurt, A smile shot sideways out his small mouth The Boy giggled. It wasn't white, it was black. Father said it was because he only had black sheep back in the day. A funny misfortune.

Later that day the boy went to bed. The little creature hitched a ride in his arms. Together they watched the night sky full of flashing stars and blasting comets.

Over the next few days the father grew tense, pushing things like “give up your secret” or “stop hiding your pet”.

The pain would be unimaginable

The Boy grew up and so did the Wolf. Soon it was time for him to take up Wolf—killer. He hated that.

It was like killing more of his best friends.

The Whole village was counting on him. He couldn't step out.

What would he do?

The day he dreaded drew near.

If only The wolf hadn't attacked. That would be a very different future indeed.

Very.

# Warrior

*Island Christian Academy, Siu, Samuel – 10*

Kai Gao: an amazing warrior, who had never lost a single battle, not even the hardest battles, as it was almost impossible to see his blood. He killed countless people; he has achieved the second-highest rank of all the warriors. The richest of all soldiers. No one has achieved being such a great warrior, for he is even richer than the king. What else could he want?

*The battle had finished. They had won again. Kai Gao was walking through the battlefield looking at the piles of dead bodies when suddenly he saw a body with armour that he recognized. A body that was from his army. He looked closer. He was seeing his own body in the stinky stacks of death.*

Just then the horn blew (sending a signal to the archers to draw their bows), the cavalry raged forward, men (with open mouths) were screaming as arrows whizzed toward them shiny points gleaming with death, people dropping all around him with cries. Kai showed no emotion at all, for he has had so much experience. His horse charged forward, dodging arrows and riding over people, killing them. Then he killed even more people with his sword and spear, more screams filled the rusty air. Disaster, tragedy, it needed to end soon! With that thought, he raged forward, knocking down the last of the enemy. With that, it ended. Kai had won again.

He strolled through the battlefield, looking at the dead bodies. Kai felt responsible for this. Then suddenly he felt a source of rage rush through him, *no more killing, no more. None at all. Stop.* He looked around once more. He saw his dead friend. Then he thought to himself, *No more, no more.*

He saw another corpse of his friend. *I will stop, and now.* Kai threw away his sword and spear as a symbol of peace, he took his horse and started to ride away. Faster, faster. His army raced to get him back. Faster, faster. As his once fellow friends gained on Kai. Kai threw himself off his horse, nearly killing him. So close to killing him, the army thought he was dead. The general gave the signal to ride away, and the army did.

After about two whole hours, Kai woke up. He was sore all over but he knew he had to go. They would come here to submerge him soon enough. He got up although it hurt a lot and started riding. He did not know where to ride or even where he was going! He just needs to get away from this place...

He rode all day long hoping to find land, but he could not find any. He was tearful, had no one to talk to, and worst of all, he could barely move. The world was a bad place for him, but Kai clenched his fist and rode on. He was not going to give up. He rode and rode and finally he found a light.

A light so bright he could barely see. A light so blazing that he felt pain all over his body. The light suddenly stopped shining and a magical buddha appeared. Kai screamed with amazement and jumped down. The buddha said, "Ride for 20 more days and nights there I will see you again." With no more pain he rode and rode. Twenty days and nights later, he rode and arrived at a cave. A cave? Why would a buddha want to meet at a cave? He looked around and finally recognized this place... It was not any cave. It was the Mogao Caves!

Just then a light shone. A light like the one he had seen twenty days and nights ago. An emitting light shone and the buddha came again. He told him he could stay here and make a life to live in. And so it started. The world was better for him. But still he was not the person he wanted to be. He hid from his problems, lived with the monks and painted to relax him. He tried to be better but he could not. No matter how hard he tried. He pushed himself to the limit, but even so he could not stop.

He kept trying but he just could not bring himself to stop. He needed to be assisted to stop him from killing people. That night he had a vision, a vision where the buddha had told him he needed to stop in order to stop sleepless nights. He pushed and pushed but he could not stop killing. The monks tried to help him but it did not work.

Then the Buddha talked to him again. He told him to not run away and hide from his problems but Kai ignored and kept living the same way. And so it resumed. He lived like he lived before. He hid from his problems, lived with the monks and painted to relax him. He just could not bring himself to a stop. He really needed help, and now.

Every night he had nightmares of the people he had killed before and the lifeless people from his army . But it was not only soldiers that he had seen lifeless. He has even seen his friend, who is an author, dead. Lifeless. It was so sad. Killing people and seeing them dead. Kai even wanted to stop, but he could not stop. It was like an addiction. But not in a good way. In a very nasty way. It was the worst thing you could ever get addicted to. The worst. The absolute worst. And he could not stop it. What could he do?

In the middle of a nightmare he woke up. Tossing and turning he heard the Buddha's voice “ You must go to the battle. And now. The fight is starting and you need to make peace. It is the only way you can stop.” Instantly he jumped out of bed, ran to the door, changed to his warrior clothes and started to run towards the battle scene. When he arrived the battle was just about to start. “STOP!”

The soldiers turned around, shocked to the extreme. He talked to both armies about peace and how much crying, deaths and sadness there had been in the world about death. Both armies did not fight and made up. Kai was excited to the extreme and went to live in Englandarmor as a happy man. Not a sad sleepless one.

armor

# Ancient Caves

*Island Christian Academy, Siu, Sonia – 10*

This story begins in the middle of a roaring sandstorm covering all the lands....It was sand, heat and thirst. There was nothing left....or was there? After the storm ,our four main characters remain stumbling among the choking dry desert ,lost, unaware of what they're going to come upon next.

"I'm so thirsty!" Andy complained , "Do we have any money or water?"

"We don't have water, although we do have a couple of coins, "Valerie commented.

Our friends saw an old lady in the distance and caught a glimpse of hope. They all rushed to the elderly woman wearing a hopeful smile on their faces. "Excuse me, do you happen to know any nearby villages? "Noah questioned eagerly

"Do you need a place to stay?" the old woman offered , "You lot can stay with me for the time being."

"Actually, we do, "Valerie thanked," we'll stay with you tonight. "A smile shone on the harmless grandma's face as they followed her to their destination. They arrived at the front door of an old and pale yellow building built into the mountain.

Granny pulled the rusty lever beside her and the door slowly pulled open. "Well go on sweeties!" the lady said kindly. The four went inside, Noah felt suspicious of something, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. "Wait—" but before Noah could finish, with a sly grin granny pulled the lever once more and the door instantly shut. She isn't so harmless now is she?

There was not a hint of light to be seen. All of them couldn't believe how that lady betrayed them. The room was pitch-black .Ali's heart pounded rapidly and her hands were clammy, she had always been afraid of the dark ever since her mother died....Out of the blue, some light appeared in Noah's hands." Good thing I brought my lantern," Noah added," I only have so many torches, but this ought to give us light for a while,at least enough." Ali sighed in relief .

"How will we get out of here?" Andy murmured.

"I'm certain we'll all get out of this place and be fine if we just be careful and keep our heads up."Valerie confirmed. All of them slowly tip-toed towards Noah to get light from the lantern, they got a nice moment huddled up together. They started exploring the dusty cave and discovered inspiring cave art creeping all over the walls and ceiling. The paintings were about special events that happened to the buddhist tribe and traditions that that tribe does, painted by the buddhist people when they were in this cave.

"Woah! This wall art is wonderful!" Ali complimented

"This is truly beautiful buddhist art." Andy agreed"I wonder if any archaeologists have found this before." They continued their exploration in the cave ,keeping an eye out for an exit, when they came upon a mysterious door. Due to their overload of curiosity, they went in.

Ali took a glance around the room and gasped in amazement. The room was a library , with books and scrolls covering the walls like a blanket! The blanket of books were there to accompany the soft chairs lying on the floor !They rested there for a while and had a lot of fun, then she found a jade scroll which stood out from the others. When she grabbed the scroll, she made a horrible mistake.

The ground let out a roaring rumble as Ali and Andy let out a shrill shriek." For heaven sake calm down," Noah barked, "probably just another storm." But was it?

Every part of Ali's body and soul quivered insanely like she was jelly. The ceiling crumbled but when they tried to escape the rocks covered the entrance. Her jaw dropped....shivers went down her spine....the floor cracked open. She fell as the darkness swallowed her whole. The last thing she saw was the terrified look on her friends faces....She lost all trace of happiness from before. The girl fell hopelessly through the pitch-black void wondering if she would die. She dozed off thinking it would be less painful dying in her sleep.She had no escape....Nowhere to go...No thought to live....

The girl found herself awaking in what seemed to be an endless room of darkness. All alone, friends nowhere to be found. She could barely see a thing as she cautiously wandered through the place for sometime. The veil of darkness obscured her surroundings, but on the spur of the moment, a miracle happened.

The darkness was broken by a light glaring. As she slowly drifted towards the light she felt the warmth of a torch. A boy slightly taller than her with flaming red hair and crystal blue eyes like hers was holding the torch." Noah!". She leaped towards him and hugged him tightly. Tears flooded her eyes and they grinned ."We ought to find the others before we do anything else!". So the two set off to find the rest of their group . Little did they know that things would get much worse. They wandered through the darkness with the little light the torch provided, the tiny sun helped them find their way to another room. Inside, they found something that they truly expected the least....It was a room filled with gold and statues but what was in the centre left them dumbstruck.

Ali covered her mouth with both hands and Noah was fuming with rage. An old man stood in front of them, bald with brown skin and he was skinny to the point that you could see his ribs through his shirt. Their friends were tied up in the middle of a circle of grey dust unconscious. "Why hello there!" the man cackled "I'm Yedalina, and you came perfectly on time to watch your loved ones die!" And he lit the dust on fire and it exploded.

".....Gunpowder...."Ali called out, "I hate you!" With that ,she pushed him into the explosion and he died.

Ali froze at her own actions.  
"There's no time!" Noah snapped, "I found an exit earlier ,let's save our friends before this place blows up." They stretched their hands into the fire and grabbed the first person they felt. Then something went horribly wrong.

Valerie was dead for sure. They shared a moment of silence for what had happened.

The silence was broken by Ali' s cries." Why must I be like this!" she scolded herself," If I had just—"her eyes welled up with tears .

They made it to the other side of the mountain, there was a village. There was this nice man who let them join the ride to the city. As they gazed at the horizon they thought about their own horizon. How they got in the situation. Why did they even go there? But that's a story for next time.

# Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

*Island Christian Academy, Srisawat, Peerawich – 10*

In the Gobi Desert, the Mogao Grottoes are a vast series of temples scattered across a steep and sheer mountain. It's a place of wisdom, a domain of thought. The artefacts there have shone a light on the ancient history of Buddhism. Now it's a landmark, unrecognised for its true beauty. An ordinary place, but it's not as ordinary as you would imagine. The events here were far too unusual to be existent. I have witnessed it.

I was at the Mogao Grottoes and the desert winds were wild and ferocious. The sandstorm blanketed everything in its path with sand. I hid in two rocks that were humongous and looked like giant limbs. I found myself inside a cavern. When I was exploring one of them, I turned around to see a shadowy silhouette. It did not seem human and the figure was giving off an unpleasant aura. The figure was in torn, ripped clothes and had a translucent body. The glow looked as pale as the moon and the tattered robes looked as if they had minds of their own, curling and waving in every direction. I edged towards the back of the room and with every step, the figure floated towards me. Its gloomy shape and ragged tendrils corralled me to the edge of the room. It was hunting me.

I must've fallen and passed out because when I woke up, I wasn't wearing my bomber jacket and jeans, but I was wearing traditional Chinese robes! I knew that something wasn't right because the cave that I was sleeping in was vivid and freshly painted. I sprang up, looking around the entire room. Everything was wild and vivid, even the ceiling was freshly-painted. I found a young boy, about my age and he looked a little bit like me. He was a young boy in sapphire and jade robes and had an old-fashioned hat, he looked no more than 12. He was sensible, unlike the monkeys in my class.

"Hey! What year is it?" I asked the boy.

"It's 366 AD and next time ask politely," Said the boy.

"Hey! What's your name?" I asked.

"It's Dai," He replied. I followed him into the deep, dark caves of the grottoes where he was grabbing some paints. While he was painting the new caves I asked him if I could paint with him. I have loved art ever since I was a child.

Of course, Dai said "Yes" so I painted one of the most beautiful paintings with him.

"So, how long have you been living here?" I asked him.

"My entire life, us monks don't get out much," He replied. We both laughed at that. We chatted all evening until he finally said something. When he sighed, I immediately knew that something was up.

"What's wrong?" I asked him.

"It's just that we're going to be attacked by a kingdom in a couple of days and that we're going to have to take drastic measures," He replied with a sigh.

The smile on my face disappeared and I felt sorry for him. I told Dai I didn't have anywhere to go so he offered me a spot inside the beds. I slept late that night thinking about the chaos and destruction the fight will bring. Blood, slavery and deaths.

The next morning, I heard yelling and footsteps coming from one of the grottoes, I crept over to see the monks sealing up one of the grottoes and filling it up with their most precious documents. I was surprised to know why they were doing this. Luckily, I found Dai staring out the window and he was pointing at something. I looked out to see the rising cloud of sand and dust coming faster every minute. I still couldn't see it but when I did, Dai did too. We both yelled, and when we did, the monks ran to the buddhas and began to pray.

"What are they doing?" I asked Dai.

"They're awakening the buddhas," Dai replied. Sure enough, the buddhas began to move their fingers and bodies. They stood up and marched towards the fight.

"They're charging forward, but what are the monks doing?" I asked Dai.

"A sacred ritual that outsiders can't know about," he replied.

About ten seconds later. I could see a goldish glow appear around the grottoes. It took me about another five seconds to realise that the glow was a barrier around the grottoes. For a moment there I thought I was imagining things, but then I realised it was real. That I wasn't living in a fairy tale.

Behind me, I heard yelling and screaming. I turned around. I saw a flash of red run past. I turned back. This time I heard footsteps behind me. I turned around to see a soldier holding a sword to slice me. It was covered in blood. Dai was with me at the time and he whispered to me “Run,” so we did.. Just when it looked like it was over, there was a loud boom of a cannon. We glanced out the window and saw buddhas being shattered to pieces. We ran back to the temple and saw that the monks were still praying.

“ What are they still doing?” I asked Dai.

“ Trying to awaken the biggest of the buddhas,” He replied. There was a great rumble in one of the caves. We rushed to the cave to see what was going on. The longest buddha was beginning to awaken and it was starting to open its eyes. Just looking at it was enough to make my bones shiver. Then all the great buddhas were awake, they started to appear out of the grottoes.

When the army saw the great buddhas, they charged with immense force and power. But the general, who was a scared man, ordered the men to retreat, so they did and the buddhas went back into their dormant forms. Then I had this tingling sensation so I looked at myself. I was beginning to perish. I looked at Dai one more time. I could tell from the expression on his face that he was sad. That’s when I just remembered the story about my ancestor. It was me. my spirit must’ve got transported. I turned to dai who was still sobbing. I was perishing faster and left only my head.

“Dai, We’ll be BFFs forever, even if we’re from different timelines,” I said.

“See you in 1500 thousand years,” He replied with a smile. I fell again but this time, I was back to the present. Like nothing happened.

# An Explorer's Journey

*Island Christian Academy, Wong, Lillian – 10*

The mellow morning sun rose over the golden sands, giving light to the Gobi desert. Mighty winds battled against him as Dave rode his exhausted camel along the barren desert searching for the Mogao Grottoes.

Eager to quench his thirst of adventure, Dave had bravely embarked on a journey to unravel the Mogao Caves' lost history and rediscover the many secrets hidden inside. However, he was not prepared for the adventure yet to come...

The caves were nowhere to be found. As he rode his camel, Dave struggled to battle the fierce sandstorms. The sun's blazing rays burned his skin whilst he blankly gazed into the distance. The sub-zero temperatures of the desert night and the cold, whistling dusty winds made sleeping almost impossible. At night, the entire desert was covered by a blanket of black fog. Dave's tent couldn't hold up against the sandstorms. It was blown away the first night. Leaving only his sleeping bag and tools behind.

After days of searching, he started to lose hope of finding the caves. Not a drop of water was left in his bottle. His skin was dry and his muscles were extremely exhausted. Nevertheless, Dave pushed himself to keep going. He still wore a mask of determination. He kept on going. Suddenly, he caught a glimpse of a shadow in the distance. "It's just an animal," he thought to himself. As he nudged his camel forwards, the shadow shifted into the shape of a man. A sharp shiver ran down his spine.

There standing was an old man. He wore dirty old rags and walked barefoot on the sand.

"Hello! What brings you here?"

Dave was paralysed. He could not hold back his fear. "Who are you?! What do you want from me?" he replied, heart pounding out of his chest; unsure of what to do next. "Do you know where the Mogao Grottoes are?"

The man stepped forwards, "The Mogao Caves you ask? Well it's right there." Then he pointed to a massive, flat mountain far in the distance and barely visible. "Most of it is covered in sand. I know where the entrance is though!" he added. "Follow me."

The old man started walking. Dave hesitated. Then hopped onto his camel and followed close behind, still keeping a close distance from the mysterious man. They got closer, He started to notice magnificent structures carved into the side of the mountain. The rocky mountain looked like it had been washed in gold. Sand piled above it glistened in the sunlight. There were a few massive worn down steps, leading up to the entrance. They carefully walked to the top of the stairs. Dave gazed at the magnificent view. The sand glistened in the sunlight and the desert stretched to meet the horizon.

"We're here!" the man exclaimed. He then pulled out an incense stick and slowly walked in.

"What's that?" Dave asked.

"It's incense to light, then worship all the buddhas," the man answered. "Before you walk in, promise to not take anything!"

"I promise," Dave replied.

"Finally, I'm here," Dave sighed in relief. He tied his camel's lead to a branch and dismounted.

Dave cautiously walked into the cave, carefully examining the paintings and buddhas. The pictures each told their own story as he studied them. The sparkling sun peered through the carved windows of the cave. He slowly moved from room to room. The statue's menacing glares gave him a mysterious feeling inside. Their vivid colors had faded yet the statue still retained their magnificence and life. Finally, he was in the Mogao Grottoes.

Then, when he entered one of the thousands of rooms, he saw a breathtaking sight. A massive buddha was standing there before him. It went from the floor to the ceiling high above him. Dave admired its hand-carved features. "This would've taken months to carve," he thought to himself. He gently glided his hand over it. It felt warm and

surprisingly smooth. After closely studying the giant buddha, he returned to the first room and he saw the old man lighting the incense he was holding.

Not long after, the smoke blew into the wall, through a crumbling hole in it. Dave peeked through. There seemed to be a hidden room. Dave's eyes lit up, he carefully chipped the wall with one of his many tools in his bag. Suddenly, the wall collapsed with a big thud. Luckily, the old man had gone to another room.

The dust faded and a room was revealed. However, it was nothing like any other. The room was filled to the brim with old books and documents. The room felt small, but it seemed to have an endless amount of papers. It had no windows or doors and was almost pitch black. Dave pulled a candle from his bag. He then lit it and slowly entered the mysterious room. Candle in hand, he examined the documents. As he was admiring the papers, the candle sparked. He took no notice.

Suddenly, the pages caught on fire one by one. The room was engulfed by smoke. He jumped up. Panic rose in his chest as he zoomed out of the room. He didn't dare look back. He thought about the promise he made with the old man. However, he shook the thought out of his mind as the fire burned and smoldered the room and the contents inside.

The flames blazed all through the room and made its way outside. Dave felt dread sweep through him like a tidal wave. The buddhas caught on fire one by one as Dave hurriedly searched for the old man. "There's a fire! Where are you!? It's not safe here! Come on!" he shouted. There was no answer. Smoke filled his lungs. He could no longer breathe but he needed to save the old man.

His heart was pounding. Then, he saw the old man lying on the ground coughing and gasping for air. He dragged himself towards the man. Dave slowly carried the man up. He ran. He ran desperately searching for the exit. Suddenly, his eyesight started to fade. He had no time, no one to help, nowhere to go. Then, everything went black.

He got up. He used his last bit of strength to get up and run. Dave frantically searched for the exit. Then, he saw a glimpse of sunlight. The exit was near. Dave pushed himself towards the sunlight. Closer, closer. The smoke faded away, he was out. He gasped for breath and immediately helped the old man up. "Thank you!" the man said to Dave. "You came back for me."

# The Creature

*Island Christian Academy, Yukihiro, Akari – 10*

There was a cave called The Mogao Caves. when people go in it, they disappear and never show up.

It was a sunny Saturday morning and the day started. Mia and three other friends were at Mia's house.

They were all reading a book but suddenly,

"Do you know the Mogao Caves!!"

It was Mia. She was in an excited tone. Flowers were popping up in her brain.

But Oliver was in a state of a how-dare-you kind of face, slightly frowning.

James was so excited he cried "Lets go now!!!!"

"No." said Akano. "we have to get prepared!"

"Huh...ok ok ok I totally forgot about that...!"moaned James.

"Ok! Everyone, we will be meeting at the Matcha Park at five o'clock! Tell your mom and dad that we are going to a playdate! Everyone, it's five o'clock! Bye~!"exclaimed Mia(she had more flowers popping in her brain now).

5 o'clock came like a fish swimming in it's sea.

"Everyone have your food, flashlight,and a lighter? I will give you all a walkie talkie for in case you get lost in the Mogao Caves. 'kay?!"Called out Mia in the silent park.

"Okay!" exclaimed James.

"... Ok..." groaned Akano

"Oh! Oh! I brought my inflatable car and it's ok for kids!" Cried Oliver.

The four settled themselves and everyone was in the car.

"I'm gonna drive!" said Oliver.

"Let's go!!!" cried James.

"I'm so scared..." groaned Akano.

They drove a long way to the Mogao caves. Fear was rising in Akano's stomach.

They reached the Mogao caves at last.

"Everyone get ready! Ok we'll go!!!" shouted Mia.

They went in. And of course Akano in the middle(she was shivering with fear).

They walked through the arch of beautiful paintings.As they walked, they found an enormous room.

"Let's go in there!"exclaimed James.

"I think something bad's going to happen..." whispered Oliver with a great shiver.

They didn't know something bad was *going* to happen...

The room was huge. But there was a hump of what seemed to be a creature.

"What is that!?" whispered James, in the highest pitch of voice.

"Let's go back before the monster realises it sees us" said Akano in a low voice.

They backed up, trying not to make a sound. However... **\*SNAP!\*** Akano, the nearest to the monster, accidentally stepped on a stick.

"Well well... Hello children...I was waiting for you..."the monster said with it's low cow-like voice and, raising it's ugly enormous almost-bald-like head.

The creature had a human-like face as big as a door and the body of it was like a spider.

The creature crawled slowly and approached Akano.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!!!!!"

The next moment, blood was dripping down the creature's mouth.

"RUN!!!" called out Mia whose decisions were way faster than normal people.

"Mmm... This is good... little human meat is the best..."whispered the creature.

"Ow!!!" Oliver tripped on a little stone and fell.

“Another one...? This kid tastes really good...So, it means...THIS KID WILL ALSO TASTE GOOD!!!”

“No...No... help... I don't wanna die... Please...”

“Oh... I love that face...”

“No—AHHHHHHHHHHHHH”

“OLIVER! NOOOO!”Screamed James.

“I'm going to go and tell the village!”said Mia.

“O—Ok,”cried James.

“I'll go back soon after I called the villagers,” said Mia.

“B—Bye”

“Bye”

Mia ran to the nearest secret passageway she found joring the fun walk she was with the other three.

She ran in.

Then she dashed to the nearest village and called for help.

Mia and the villagers came back.

There was no monster. Just the footprints towards the wall that seemed to be James.

3 years later. Mia was playing with her new friends then suddenly, “Knock, knock, no—” *★THUD★*

“What was that?!”exclaimed Mia.

She opened the front door and saw a boy with long hair and so bloody.

Mia noticed at once. Fat beads of tears leaked and landed on the floor.

“JAMES!!! You are back! You are alive! Thank god! Friends! Come and help!!! Oh, James tell me about your story later!!!”Cried Mia.

James looked exhausted, tired and had puffy eyes.

After he was bandaged up, he talked about how he escaped from the creature to Mia.

What was so surprising was that James killed the monster.

# The Buddhas and the Mogao Grottoes

*International Christian School, Chan, Karin – 10*

It was a warm summer. The sun peeked through the corners of windows, everyone was frolicking about in the park. Well, almost everyone. Toby was stuck at home throwing a pity party for himself while doing chores, with only his mother's bickering trailing him everywhere he went.

"Go clean your room." "Wash the dishes." "That was your fault, not mine."

The only way Toby could get any peace was by hiding in the basement. He would busy himself observing precious antiques while the thick walls of the basement muffled his mother's screams.

As Toby was horsing around the cellar, he was careless of where he ran and accidentally stubbed his toe into one of the drawers, causing the few items contained inside of it fall out.

Toby winced. Even such a small misdeed was enough to make his Mom jump up and down in rage. He crouched down to the floor and began picking things up. An old letter, a compass, some pennies, and a dusty old scroll. Toby stared at the last item. It was probably left by that archeologist grandpa of his who had vanished mysteriously one day; the police never found his body. On it, he spotted the Flying Apsaras symbol, which he knew from history classes was the symbol for Mogao Grottoes. He remembered his mum telling him that grandpa would make frequent trips there to study its wall painting.

As Toby was about to bring the scripture closer to his face for further investigation, the room he was in went dark. Toby knew this wasn't a power outage: something felt off. The floor creaked with every single movement he made and the air was chillier than usual.

Suddenly, the light flickered on slowly.

"Am I hallucinating, or are there really two giant buddhas staring at me?" He thought.

Among the light, there were actually 2 buddhas, staring at him. One had huge ears and was doing the lotus pose, and had wrinkles on his forehead that just about matched the worn-out robe he was wearing. The other one looked like the buddha version of a spartan warrior. He had fiery red eyes and his face was pouty as if he was a child being told off. He had a horseshoe-styled mustache that looked like it had been slathered with hair gel.

"Looks like our dinner has just arrived," said one.

"Actually, I've just started preparing the soup. I won't make the same mistake as that time when his grandpa nearly escaped from us while we were busy." responded the other.

"Served his grandpa right for stealing the scroll from us. Fortunately, we got him back by teleporting him here after he had laid eyes on the Flying Apsaras," the Buddha with the giant ears snickered.

Toby's heart raced. So this was what happened to his grandpa – feasted upon by these sinister-looking buddhas! It rattled him that he could now smell the scent of a cauldron bubbling: his death was, too, going to be a painful one.

Toby scanned the chambers for an escape route; he knew from history books that the caves were situated in the middle of a desert; if he could only find a way out and a camel nearby, he could ride eastwards and reach Beijing. From there, he could fly back to Hong Kong via plane.

Suddenly, Toby realized he was still clutching the scroll in his hands: There was a chance he could use that as a shield. It wasn't going to save him, but it was going to buy him some time.

It wasn't the best weapon, yet people always say; "A drowning man will hold on to a piece of straw".

But Toby also had an advantage. The paper could be folded into a sword or a rock, and paper also could give paper cuts. If Toby was really lucky, he would be able to give the buddhas a quick slash on the finger to stun them.

As much as Toby wanted to attack them then and there while they were discussing on what meals they should cook with a fresh boy, he decided to wait for the perfect moment, when they least expected it. That way, they would be less aware, and Toby would have a better chance of escaping Mogao Grottoes.

He wasn't sure if buddhas were immortal or granted some kind of magical ability to be immune to pain – but he needed to stay positive, especially at this moment.

"I'm getting extremely hungry! Let's cook him now!" The warrior buddha said, while the big-eared buddha lifted him up by his armpits. Toby protested, kicking and screaming, and he quickly slashed the big-eared buddha on the face, making a thin but bloody scar that stretched down from his eyebrow to his lip.

"Ouch!" He said and put down Toby, clutching his face in pain.

This was his moment. Toby shoved the buddha down the floor, then used his left foot to stamp on him.

The big-eared buddha tried to evade Toby's feet by rolling over to the warrior buddha and grabbing onto him. The warrior buddha, far from acting as his anchor, took a stumble and fell onto him.

"Not only they are very hungry, but very clumsy as well." Toby thought to himself.

He looked at the two buddhas, sprawled out of the floor like starfish, then trampled them both.

"Take me home. I didn't steal the scroll or anything and don't deserve a grisly end." He said to it. Almost immediately, Toby was yet again engulfed in darkness, but this time for a good reason. He was glad he didn't have to hitch a ride on a camel and beg for money along the way to pay for the plane ticket, but instead being teleported back home instead.

# Lost...but Found

*International Christian School, Cheng, Alethea – 10*

“Tell me my favourite!” I said, my tiny hands grasping my mother’s long black hair.

“Alright, alright.” Mom said, smiling. “Long, long ago, there lived a kindhearted deer. It had magnificent antlers, a long graceful neck, and a pair of liquid brown eyes. Yet, what makes it extraordinary is its nine-coloured coat. Legend has it that it is the incarnation of the Buddha Jataka. One day, it spotted a merchant lost in a desert storm. The deer quickly came to his rescue, then, the lucky man promised he would tell no one of the deer. Meanwhile, back in the kingdom, the queen dreamt about the legendary nine-coloured deer. Driven by a heart fraught with greed, she talked the king into issuing a decree that whoever captured the deer would be rewarded. The merchant gave in to his cupidity. The merchant led the army to the deer and captured it. Shaken by betrayal, the nine-coloured deer stood before the throne and told the king how it rescued the merchant. The king was moved and banished the greedy merchant. He then issued another decree: ‘Everyone must protect the deer.’ From then on, the deer became a symbol of hope for those who were lost.”

As Mom was talking, I looked out the window. The old wooden beams creaked softly as I put all my weight on it, my eyes squinted. Inky darkness fell over the earth houses in my village. The moon peeked out from a cloud, barely visible.

“Nine-coloured deer, where are you?” I whispered.

Suddenly, a flash of shimmering antlers glinted, reflecting the moonlight. I squealed in delight. Mom came over.

“What have you gotten into this time?” Mom started to sing, “Hush little baby don’t say a word...”

My weary eyes caught a glimpse of shining antlers again. My vivid three-year-old imagination led me into the nine-coloured deer dream.

Today is my eighteenth birthday.

I jumped out of bed and ran down the stairs excitedly. I found a beautifully wrapped present waiting for me on the kitchen table. There was a tag on it, saying, “Package ordered in: 2000. Delivered in: 2018.” My hands shook as I ripped it open and found. . . a ticket? The ticket read: ‘Mogao Caves: Exclusive Tour.’

Although I lived in Dunhuang province, I had never gone to the Mogao Caves. It was a hot tourist spot, and besides, our family stopped having family trips since I was three.

My eyes were lowered as I grabbed the ticket and walked out the door. The tourist bus squealed to a stop and I rushed inside. After a while, the bus skidded to a halt.

I walked out and looked up. I gasped. I saw intricate designed wooden beams, perfectly made to hold up the roofs. The “Caves of Thousand Buddhas” were stacked on top of each other so precisely that it hardly seemed human made. It looked nothing like the dusty old caves I’d imagined, laden with cobwebs.

“Miss. Do you have a ticket?” a gruff voice asked.

“Oh! It’s here!” I fished my ticket out of my pocket.

The guard inspected it closely and handed it back to me.

“Seems valid. You may go in but remember not to touch anything.” he said. “Oh, and miss, you’ve got a huge stain on your hoodie. How about you go to the toilet to clean up?”

I looked down at my hoodie. A gigantic stain was on my hoodie. ‘Strange. . .’ I thought to myself. I excused myself to the bathroom anyway. A small voice whispered in my head, saying, “If only mom was here. . .she’d help me clean it up. . .”

Small tendrils of light curled around my face. ‘Your wish is granted.’ it seemed to whisper.

“W—w—what?” I stammered.

Suddenly, a burst of blinding rainbow light hit my face. I closed my eyes and turned away. A warm nose touched my cheek.

“Don’t be afraid. I will not harm you.” a gentle voice said.

I opened my eyes and saw a shining deer. Its fur shone with nine beautiful colors that seemed to move around in its fur. Its antlers were engraved with patterns that shone with white light. Its whole body seemed to radiate an aura of gentleness and kindness.

“Don’t you remember me? I answered your wish before, back when you lived with your mother.” it smiled.

“You’re. . .the nine coloured deer! Can you bring my mother back?” my eyes widened with hope.

“I’m sorry. I have done everything I could, but your mother cannot come back.” the deer bowed its head.

“NO! It isn’t fair! Life isn’t fair!” I yelled, tears streaming down my cheeks.

“You’re right. Life isn’t fair. I feel your pain, young one. You are so young, but trapped in such darkness. But yet I find your hope. A shining beacon in the darkness.” the deer whispered gently.

My tears subsided. “What do you mean?” I asked. “I’ve never hoped since mom was gone. . .”

“Ah, but you have. You hope every day, wishing for a miracle. That is why I advised your mother to bring you here.”

“You advised?” I asked.

“Yes. You see, the Mogao Caves was once a place of marvels, of beauty. All it took was one meek little monk to spark caves of marvels. But it soon got forgotten, forsaken. Everyone wanted to be fast, and not stroll down the slow memory lane. Humans are like that. They remember, and they forget. But then, it was discovered again. Centuries of treasures and beauty stored away. You see, humans were destined to find this treasure again. We all are. Not just this, but we were destined to find that missing piece of ourselves which we stored away. It is our nature, our destiny.” the deer explained.

I nodded, new understanding flooding into me. The deer smiled and disappeared into light. I stepped out of the bathroom and saw a stunning sunset outside. And for the first time, I felt at peace.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*International Christian School, Cheng, Idison – 9*

At a school called ICS, a teacher named Miss Dora was teaching a group of students about caves on Silk Road, the Mogao Grottoes in the Dunhuang, that existed half millennia years ago. One student named Ryan was interested in it so much. He decided to go and explore the Mogao Grottoes because he feels that there still has a secret place hidden in the Mogao Grottoes no one discovered yet.

Ryan used all his recess time to work on the research about the Mogao Grottoes. Actually a few students saw Ryan researching and told him that they were also interested in exploring the Mogao Grottoes. They were Jin, Ziv, Miles and Katy. Ryan was over the moon because they were kindred spirits.

So, they started to come up with a name of their group, which was “The Adventures Elf” and they decided to explore the Mogao Grottoes on the first day of the Easter holiday. Then they divided the work equally between each other. Ryan and Katy are good at using the computer so they were responsible for the research of the secret place. Ziv likes doing builder stuff so he will prepare ropes, flashlights, and other sorts of equipment. Jin is good at drawing so she will be drawing a map for exploring the Mogao Grottoes. Miles is food lover so he will prepare the snacks for everyone.

On the first day of the Easter holiday, they took an airplane to China “Dunhuang” to start their expedition. When they arrived at Dunhuang, the sky was blue and the sun shone bright. They started to look for the Mogao Grottoes. After few hours, they had found it. Right in front of them, was the famous Mogao Grottoes. Suddenly, Ryan’s heart heard a peculiar voice crying out to him. The voice told him to keep moving forward. When they walked in the caves it was petrifying as there were bats fluttering around. They started to feel afraid, especially Miles who was crying his heart out. But Ryan was courageous, he led everyone and told them “Don’t be afraid, I heard a voice telling us to proceed forward and we will arrive at the special place”. “No turning back now”! When they walked deeper and deeper, they saw teensy-weensy pinch of lights flying around. It was lighting bugs. The lighting bugs lights filled the caves full of brightness. Ryan felt spine-chilly voice telling him to pick up a stone in front of him and under the stone was a marble. He picked it up and move forward with the gang. When they moved forward, Jin and Ziv both noticed that both sides of cave were filled with breathtaking sculptures. They walked forward and spotted a baby dragon. It was red and had scales all over it’s body. It tried to breathe fire, but all it did was breathe puffs of smoke out. Katy quickly rushed to hold the baby dragon. Ziv said “Katy we should let it go, it is a wild creature we should let it roam free”. So, they released the baby dragon and it flew away. Ryan heard a voice telling him that a few meters away is the special place. So they moved on. The caves started to get brighter and brighter until they found out that it was a bunch of diamonds shimmering around. They all shouted “We arrived!”. Miles found a small dimond and wanted to bring it back home for his collection. But when he picked it up, the ground shook very hard. “Put it down” Jin cried. Then Ryan found the hole that was similar to the shape of the marble. He thought “The secret thing must be here!” He put the marble in the hole and the caves walls tore apart, inside was a golden sword on a stone. The voice told him to pick up and he did it.

Suddenly, the cave started to shake harder than before. Then, out of nowhere was a phoenix telling them to hop on its back and the phoenix flew out of the cave and dropped them off in a village. They said thank you to the phoenix. Then, Ziv said “Ryan where was the golden sword you were holding on.” Ryan replied “I don’t know, it just disappeared. The phoenix told Ryan that he was the protector of the golden sword, inside the golden sword was a demon that destroys everything in its path. The demon knew that Ryan was capable of wielding the sword, so he used a demon soldier to try and tell Ryan to pick up the sword. The phoenix also told them to keep the Mogao Grottoes secret place a secret. Then, they went back to the airport to share their experience in the Mogao Grottes journal.

They all learned that they should protect mythical creatures and let them roam where they want. They should also not take things they’re not supposed to. At the end, everyone promised that they will keep the secret place of Mogao Grottoes a secret.

# The Mogao Grottoes

*International Christian School, Hung, Kristobel – 11*

## Prologue

I looked out the window of the bus, seeing nothing but a dry desert.

Today our class was going on a field trip to the Mogao Grottoes, and I was the only one who wasn't excited. First of all, I hated long car rides. The ride from our school to the Mogao Grottoes was over 2 hours, and I was already starting to get car sick. Another thing was that I've never been interested in art. I've always preferred reading over anything else. "Get ready class!" exclaimed Mrs Chen, our homeroom teacher, "We'll arrive in 10 minutes!" Everyone Cheered. "Oh great," I thought, "This is going to be the most boring field trip ever."

## Chapter 1

I stepped out of the bus along with a cluster of students holding clipboards, journals, and pens. After that, we still had to take a shuttle bus from the Mogao Caves Digital Exhibition Center to get to the actual site.

I thought on the bus: "Why did Mama have to sign me up for this? She knew that I preferred to stay at home."

"An," Mama said earlier this morning at breakfast, "This field trip will be a great opportunity for you to make some new friends! It isn't healthy to be alone all the time."

The shuttle bus stopped in front of a magnificent site. The doors opened, and one by one, we got off. I was the last one to get off, so my classmates had already gathered around our teacher.

I looked around, then slowly made my way towards them. "Time to put you all into groups!" Our teacher announced. Mrs Chen was one of those people who seemed to never be sad. A smile was always glued to her face. Bit by bit, the line got shorter. "And lastly," Mrs Chen said, "An and Daisy!" I turned around just to see Daisy looking at me with a huge grin. She wore braces, and always kept her pitch black hair in pigtails. "Ooh, I'm so Excited!" she squealed, "Let's go, partner!"

## Chapter 2

Daisy was the last person I wanted to be partners with. She never stopped talking, and always annoyed me.

"So, what should we do next?" Daisy asked. I shrugged. "I suggest that we see the cave temples first! I heard that the Mogao grottoes hold the world's largest collection of buddhist art! And have you heard that the caves were actually carved by hand? You can learn so much just from reading!" She stopped talking, and looked at me for a reply. I nodded. "Okay let's go then!" She said, already starting to run towards the ancient structure.

It was a bit dark inside. I continued to follow Daisy as she skipped along, stopping now and then to look around.

"We could be here for days! Did you know that there are 735 caves in total?" she sighed happily. "You know you should also start talking An, and we really should start working on our worksheets."

"Okay." I finally responded. We both took out pencils from our backpacks and sat down outside one of the caves. For a while we were exchanging questions and answers, filling in each of the boxes carefully.

"One last question!..." Daisy continued, "And...done!"

We both stood up with our newly finished worksheets.

"Now that we're done, we can just enjoy the rest of the field trip!" she exclaimed. I nodded, and we continued to walk along the tunnel of caves.

## Chapter 3

"There's just so much to learn here!" Daisy said in a dreamy voice. "It's such a pity that the field trip ends in an hour or so."

I was actually starting to relax. Daisy wasn't as annoying as I thought, and maybe we could even become friends. I guess this field trip wasn't as bad.

We stopped by a particular cave that felt different from the others. Inside were some scrolls, and it was about the size of my bedroom. "This is the Library cave!" Daisy exclaimed, "Oh I could just go on and on talking about this cave alone! Did you know that the World's earliest printed book was found here? And have I mentioned that most of the items in the Library cave can be found online? I just can't forget the fact that nearly 50,000 ancient documents were found here!"

My head was about to burst. Without thinking, I just exploded. "You're so annoying Daisy!" I yelled, "Can't you just be quiet for a minute?! I'd rather run all the way home than be partners with you!" Instantly, she ran away.

"Wait!" I tried yelling to her, but it was too late.

#### Chapter 4

"Daisy!" I yelled. My voice echoed through the empty tunnel of caves. This wasn't looking so good, since we had to meet back with our teacher in half an hour. I started to run. My jacket flapped against the wind. "Daisy!" I yelled, with more panic this time. Just when I was about to go and find Mrs Chen, I heard sobbing coming from one of the caves. I peeked inside and noticed Daisy sitting in the corner sniffing, and wiping her tears with her sleeve. "I'm sorry," I said as I approached her. "I know what I said really hurt you."

"It's fine." She said, wiping a tear off her cheek. "I just never knew that you thought I was annoying. I'm sorry if I bothered you." I offered her a hand, and helped her up. "Now come on," I said. "Let's meet back with the class."

#### Chapter 5

We met back with the class a minute later. Everyone looked exhausted, yet relieved. After our teacher did a quick head count, we headed back into the shuttle bus that would take us back to the start. I then plopped down in my seat, trying to catch my breath. "I guess you never know what could happen.." I said aloud. Then, I leaned back in my chair for a short rest.

# Zhangwei and the Mysteries of the Mogao Caves

*International Christian School, Yang, Renee – 10*

“Come down Zhang Wei, you're late to school!” Zhang Wei's dad shouted. “Coming!” Zhang Wei replied, then he ran down the stairs of his house and got into his dad's car. Then they drove off to school. “Well well well, look who is late again”. A voice called out just as he walked into the classroom. He already knew that voice it was his teacher Ms Adam's, as usual scolding him for being late. He didn't really care at this point since he was used to it by now. “Anyways, let's start class now” Ms Adam said in a strict tone. Zhang Wei never listened to Ms Adam's lecture. All he was thinking about now was his favourite class, Science – he was thinking about the formula's the teacher taught the class the other day. “Di ling di ling” The Clock made a sound as it interrupted Zhang Wei's thought. Then all his classmates ran down the hallway like they were free. Zhang Wei didn't care though, he just plugged in his earphones and started listening to his playlist. Di ling Di ling The clock rang again, The school day ended quicker then he had expected.

When he arrived home he started his homework until he was interrupted by his dad asking him to get the mail. When checking the mail, Zhang Wei discovers a postcard addressed to his dad with a picture of an old cave. The postcard was all written in Chinese and other than his surname, Zhang Wei couldn't understand much, so he decided to ask his dad about it. When looking at the card, his dad firstly had a smile but as he read the message he started to frown. “The cave is the Mogao cave and it was actually where your mom grew up.” “And this card is actually from your uncle and he said many relics within the Mogao cave area are now at the risk of disappearing because of climate change” his dad answered. “Mogao cave is also where I first met your mom, and I fell in love with her at first sight,” his dad smiled. “And I need to go back and help the people there”, at that time Zhang Wei only knew his dad teaches archaeology in university but little did he know, he is a world renowned archaeologist studying Mogao Caves, Growing up Zhang Wei was very curious since he only knew little about his mom who passed away after he was born, knowing a little about his mom's family roots he decided to ask his dad to take him along for the trip.

In Dunhuang, although the city looks modern, it is very different from the US and most people on the street cannot speak English. Since Zhang Wei's dad was busy, he decided to go on a city tour and visit the flea market. He soon stopped at a jade shop & found an interesting dragon-shaped jade necklace. The old man that owned the shop said the dragon is auspicious in Chinese culture, so Zhang Wei decided to buy it as a souvenir. That night Zhang Wei had a dream that night with a flying Buddha coming to talk to him but when he tried to feel him, he faded out and became sand to be blown away by wind. He told his dream to his dad the next morning during breakfast and drew his visual of the flying Buddha. His dad was very surprised as the image is the same as the Buddha statue the archaeologist team is trying to salvage.

Zhang Wei asked his dad to take him to see the statue. When they arrived, Zhang Wei was astonished by its size and height; it was about 10-floor high. His dad explained that it's one of the largest statues in the Mogao Cave and there were hundreds of smaller ones but all were multi-floor high. walking around, Zhang Wei found all the Buddha statues which all looked differently and seemed to have both male and female. And as he was so occupied looking at these magnificent buddha statues, he was stumbled upon by something on the floor. When he picked it up and looked closer, he found it was a key with a dragon engraved on it. And the dragon looks similar to the one he bought in the flea market. He showed his dad the key during dinner. His dad was surprised and asked Zhang Wei to show him where he found the key. That night Zhang Wei had another dream that night and the same Buddha appeared again, this time he was smiling and nodding. But again when he tried to feel him, he faded away again.

The next day Zhang Wei's dad and his crews arrived at the place and through X-ray probing, there seemed to be an underground cave. As they were wondering whether they should drill to investigate further, they found a keyhole and decided to use the key Zhang Wei found and try. “There is a big cave underground,” the crew shouted.

Over the next 1year the team uncovered and salvaged many relics underground and this underground cave was the largest finding in history by the archaeologist team working there. Zhang Wei only stayed in Dunhuang for a month and sadly he didn't find much about his mother's roots. And he returned back to his school life in the US. One day as he was doing his usual day-dreaming, he dreamed of the same Buddha and his mother standing next to him. Both of them waved to Zhang Wei and said “Thank you”.

# Mogao Grottoes

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Cheung, Ayden – 10*

Once in a land in ancient China, on a warm summer's day, a baby named Zue Yun came screaming, kicking, and wailing into being. He quickly was the joy of his mother and father's life.

At the time he was seven, he learned to walk, talk, and till the farmlands.

By the time he was ten, he was the smartest person in school.

When Zue Yun was twenty, he had to leave this home for ninety-nine days to test his strength, bravery, and his ability to cook. This all sounded easy. Then again, this was not as there were dragons and spirits roaming around.

The day when Zue Yun turned twenty rolled along as quickly as an evil spirit chasing a Whimp. He packed his bag with the most helpful items such as a jade blade with the enchantment of Damage Dealer, two dozen huge jam tarts, scrolls to read, a mini portable shrine to praise the gods, and a sleeping bag, which came with his stuffed rabbit.

At the time Zue Yun set off, the sun was just rising, so he kissed his parents goodbye and did a small Hula to entertain them. As he went toward the east, he passed jagged mountains, flowing rivers, ginormous ravines, and mysterious caves. He also saw a Billyblilly bird's nest with eight eggs, a Washchash guping salmon, an Energetic spirit leaping, and a Sepider's glowing eyes. Zue Yun was so focused on the wonderful animals that he slipped and fell off a cliff!

He was quick to react though, and went on his stomach and spread his weight, aimed for the softest bush he could find, and fell in with a CRUNCH!

He fell on an angry baby dragon! The dragon let out a tremendous ROAR, but ruined the dramatic effect by sneezing. Zue Yun ran for his life!!! He swore if he ever lived he wouldn't eat dragon stew for the rest of his life. After a quick dash here and there, a fake left, a fake right, and Zue Yun saw it: the perfect hiding spot, a cave with a lot of mini caves in it. He ran in as fast as he could (about as fast a speeding ostrich) and ducked in the cave. Luckily for him, the baby dragon was dumb, and flew right past Zue Yun without a second thought. Not like the dragon would have any more thoughts, because it smashed right into a boulder. Dragon brains were precious in his village, so by nightfall Zue Yun made a wonky clay pot with Buddha's face on it, and stored the brains inside. He ate two jam tarts and went to sleep.

By the next month or so, Zue Yun made many pots and portable cubbyholes, and stored many things in them, such as dragon hide, spirit soul, and fairy wings. He collected these items really easily thanks to his enchanted blade. Today was the fourth-fifth day, and he decided to gather goblin bones for the funsies. He could tell he entered goblin territory in the woods as the trees grew thicker and darker with more cuts and slashes, and Zue Yun could tell those marks were not tattoos.

He found his first goblin soon as he drew his blade, he could tell it wanted the jade. SHING! SLASH! STAB! Zue Yun's fist goblin down. But like cockroaches, goblins knew if one of their kind were dead, and also like cockroaches, they knew where to find them. Two more goblins came out, as well as a bloodcurdling battle cry. CHOP! Down went a goblin. HACK! There went another one. But he was quickly outnumbered and was forced to grab the bones and run away! Zue Yun backedtracked and backedtracked and backedtraked. The sun was setting and spirits were floating in the clearing where his base camp was. Zue Yun defeated the weaker spirits and dodged the stronger ones. He ducked into his base camp and ate some Billybilly bird wings topped off with Shmeell seasoning and put away the goblinw bones. That was enough for today.

On the ninety-ninth day, Zue Yun started to ride home on a tamed Fohoxed, which were like horses which hunt. When he arrived, his parents cried with tears of joy! A feast was held in his name with all his favorite foods! The

party lasted up until next morning non-stop! At last when the party feast cooled down Zue Yun was to tell the crowd about his journey. Zue Yun spoke and spoke until he felt his tongue would fall out. He drank some wine and got to the point about the caves.

“Hey, there is a place where we can store our things! There is not enough space in our titchy houses! Let me introduce you to a new area!” Soon he was leading his village on their horses, and Zue Yun was on his Fohoxed. The village people loved the caves instantly and started to file out their things and junk.

They decided that such an important place needed a name and so they took on a vote to name the caves. They wrote three names on stone tablets and asked the villagers to line up behind them. “And the winner is...” called out Zue Yun, then let out a dramatic pause, “Mogao Grottoes!!!”

Months later, a traveler from a different village came and saw Mogao Grottoes with people in it. “Yo, what’s this?” The villagers explained the background story of Mogao Grottoes and the traveler got excited by all of the cool stuff and wanted to barter with the villagers. When he got back to his village he told the villagers about it. Soon the news spread and Mogao Grottoes became popular.

Mogao Grottoes was good and awesome and it still is to this day.

# Dreams Can Come True

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Guillet, Amelia – 10*

I rushed to the Mogao Grottoes desperately wanting to know where I was in my dream. I remember I was inside the Mogao Grottoes but I wasn't sure which one.

"I think this is the same Mogao Grotto because a half moon sign was marked on the edge of the Mogao Grotto rooftop just like my dream ..." I muttered to myself. "I mean though, it's probably not the same Mogao Grotto because it was just a dream, right?"

I went inside but didn't see anyone in sight. I looked at the paintings and sculptures on the wall.

"Ugh wrong one." I frustratedly said and left.

I knew I wasn't going to find the right Mogao Grotto anytime soon. I was going to walk back home when I realised I was lost.

"Wa.what?!? Which way did I go!" I cried.

It started pouring rain. I ran back inside the Mogao Grotto for shelter, I could feel the water dripping down my face. I started to scan the room, I saw paintings and sculptures on the wall. The paintings had people inside, I didn't recognize the people. I spotted a purple necklace next to me. The pendant of the necklace looked a lot like a painting I saw on the wall. I thought that it must be special and this just be a sign that I must be close to the place I saw in my dream. I picked it up and put it on, and the necklace started to glow. A gap in the floor started to open beneath me. THUD! I fell through the hole.

I looked around but it was too dark to see anything. The glow of the necklace was not strong enough. I remember having my emergency packet of matches in my pocket. I lit up a match and started to look around.

"Wait how?!?" I gasped "The painting and sculptures are the same! I swear this is the same as my dream!"

Memories from my dream started running back to me. I have remembered everything now.

I saw three doors, not knowing what they led to. One of the doors was white with blue zig zags all across the door, the second door was black with 10 neon blue paw prints randomly spread across the door and the third door was purple with 1 yellow sunflower pattern.

"Should I choose a door?" I asked myself.

I tried my luck and picked the third door. I slowly walked towards the door and started turning the handle. A flash of light burst out of the room the second I fully opened the door.

"MY EYES!" I yelled

This was way too bright for my eyes. Closing my eyes I walked out the door. I opened my eyes and saw that I was outside. I walked around a little to explore. I saw that there was another Mogao Grotto!

"Well at least it's not that bright anymore..." I muttered.

There were paintings and sculptures inside this Mogao Grotto. I heard a faint sound of footsteps. I quickly searched the room for a place to hide. I noticed a little gap in between the walls. I slipped in and moved a painting to cover me up. I tried to hear if there was any talking around me but the sound just got fainter and fainter. I slipped back out the gap that I hid in.

I saw a painting that captured my attention. I took a closer look at the painting. In the center of the painting was the Buddha and beside the Buddha was land and a pond. There were musicians and dancers around the pond.

There were monks watching the musicians and dancers.

"What a beautiful painting." I thought.

Out of nowhere I noticed that one of the monks in the painting looked exactly like me! The person in the painting was wearing the same clothes that I wore in my dream and had the same purple necklace as me! I realised that the monk in the painting was me in my past life. Suddenly all the memories from that life came back to me. My eyes filled with tears and I then realized why the pouring rain turned me back to the first Mogao Grotto and then led me to this one. If it didn't rain, I would not have come back into that Mogao Grotto. It was all meant to be. This is why I dreamt of it and knew a lot about the Mogao Grottoes. I was a monk there 1,000 years ago!

# The Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Leong, Trisha – 10*

The tale of the Mogao Grottoes was a very famous story indeed. Millions and millions of people across China passed on the story. It began like this,

More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided to dig up what he thought was a special thing that was in a cave in the oasis of the desert. The special treasure questioned the people of China, this made them pass on the tale by telling more stories about it. It has been said the treasure was a thousand diamond dragon scales, protected by a ferocious demon dragon nicknamed, Xié ‘è’. Others say that the treasure was a pile of real gold, but whoever came into the cave, never got out. But the most popular legend out of all was the Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth.

Han Xin was told by his grandfather that the Mogao Grottoes were just a plain myth. He said they were fake and all the other legends were garbage and that Han Xin was wasting his time listening to these stupid stories. Han Xin didn’t agree. His family was extremely poor, his baba was a farmer, but could only make a penny or two. Right after Han Xin’s mama died of heart disease, baba would cry for ages and ages. He never recovered from his (and the family’s) painful loss. Han Xin wanted to prove to his family (especially his mama and grandfather) how the legends weren’t fake and how the “silly” legend of the seven pearl tiger teeth were real and how the tiger teeth could make a fortune for them. That night, Han Xin packed his things for the long journey to the Mogao Grottoes located in the Forbidden Peaks. He swung his brown rucksack over his shoulder and waited until midnight. Hours passed, he could hear the faint footsteps of his family going up to sleep. The clock strikes twelve, he sprints towards the broken window and jumps. Fwump! He fell on the grass. His knees were bruised badly, he dusted them off and clumsily stumbled towards the forest beside his slum, the Hù Lì forest. The thick brambles and twigs scraped his knees painfully and his knees badly ached. He now longed for home, missing his baba and the rest of his family. Han Xin decided to sleep in the Hù Lì Forest for the night. He laid on a patch of grass, his knees continuing to sting in pain. He closed his eyes and covered himself with an extra shirt to stay warm. He started to feel numb and more numb, and he fell asleep.

Han Xin looked around in horror. His rucksack...was gone. He lifted up his extra shirt from his body and glanced around the grass patch. His rucksack was stolen by cunning and mischievous foxes! Luckily, the cave was not long from the Hù Lì forest. He would at least be able to survive one more day without food and water. Soon, Han Xin was trudging through the cold, damp snow. But in the corner of his eye, he saw an opening in the mountain near him. Shivering, he stumbled to the hole and discovered that it was a cave! Almost running, he proceeded to the cave eagerly, thinking it was just easy to get the Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth. Oh, but oh dear. He was so wrong. A floor-shaking roar echoed in the dim cave. Han Xin was terrified. Looking around, he followed the unsettling stench and grumbles to a burrow that was covered in muck. He wrinkled his nose as he half walked into the burrow. Suddenly, a pair of sinister blood-red eyes flashed before his eyes. It leaped out of its burrow. It was a horrifying creature that Han Xin had never seen before. It had the eyes of a greedy goblin. The tail of a dangerous dragon. And the body of a werewolf. It growled aggressively and Han Xin shivered with fright. Fumbling in his grazed pocket, all he could find was a pocket knife, stolen from his baba’s bedside table— wait... the pocket knife! He grabbed the pocket knife from his pocket. And stabbed the creature! It howled in pain and swung its sharp long claws at Han Xin. He successfully ducked and sliced the pocket knife again. The creature screeched an ear-deafening sound and sank its teeth into Han Xin’s arm. Quivering, Han Xin limped to a corner across the cave. Bleeding uncontrollably, he sat still tiredly on a flat stone, waiting for his life to end. He could feel the hot breath of the creature, slowly walking towards him in its dirty paws. Han Xin closed his eyes. This was definitely the end. Miraculously, Han Xin felt the creature’s hot breath slowly fade away. The creature had backed off! He could see the apologetic look in the creature’s squinty blood-red eyes. Han Xin was thinking about whether he should speak or stab the creature. But no— he couldn’t, he wouldn’t! That would be so cruel! He shakily stood up and reached for some leftover bandages in his tattered pocket. He stuck them on the wounds of the stabbing he did to the creature. Surprisingly, the creature spat at Han Xin. Before Han Xin could be angry, the spit healed him! The bleeding was gone, so were the bite marks and scratches. Actually, he felt a lot better! He thanked the creature by patting its back. It grunted softly and smiled gratefully. Han Xin, still tired from the battle, noticed the creature was lonely. It only had the The Seven Pearl Tiger Teeth to keep it

company. Han Xin looked sympathetically at the creature. Wanting to be the creature's friend, he suddenly felt something in his mind. He remembered he brought an apple for the treacherous trip. He put it in his right pocket and— and that's when he had it. He reached for the apple and gave it to the creature, smiling with kindness. The creature, stunned for a minute, hugged Han Xin and the apple. The creature handed over the seven tiger teeth and Han Xin waved goodbye. The creature waved back and slowly, but surely, made its way back to its cozy burrow. Han Xin couldn't wait to tell his family. But one thing's for sure, he was going to tell everyone how he made friends with a monster. Oh how shocked they will feel when he tells them!

# The Mysterious Magao Caves

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Lo, Kailee – 9*

It was just a normal day for Beck Oliver, as he was walking to the book shop, he wanted to buy some books. He got tired, so he decided to drive his dark blue RV. He called his RV with this app called 'Car come'. Suddenly his friend Jade West showed up. She wanted to go to the book shop too!

"I need some history books." Jade said.

Everyone was staring at her, because she was a very scary and a cool girl. She stepped into his car as he stopped for her to enter. She looked pure, and she always has silver scissors with her.

"Ehh. . . . Jade thinks she owns Beck. That pure face! She is not his only friend!" one of the people staring at Jade and Beck named Andromeda said while looking at Jade and Beck.

I'll take him on a better hangout! Andromeda, thought.

The next day Andromeda took Beck out on a trip.

"So, after this we have a lot to do. First, we will go to the Mogao Caves, then. . ." Andromeda told Beck as she was slurping her meatball filled pasta at 'Pizza Planet'.

"Don't you like my cool black hair?" Andromeda asked.

"It is cool!" Beck replied.

"I hate Jade's brown hair; I mean she changes the bottom part of her hair twice this week. Today she has pink hair at the bottom." Andromeda said.

Then Jade showed up at the restaurant and said, "Hey there Andromeda and Beck!"

"Jade, you change your bottom hair colour from pink to teal." Andromeda said while looking at Jade like a baby.

"Hey Jade, I was just hanging out with Andromeda today." Beck said.

"That'll be twenty dollars." said the cashier at Pizza Planet named Jimmy. "Oh no! It's J. . . JJ. . . Jade W. . . West." He said in a scared Italian voice.

Everyone was afraid of Jade. Except for Andromeda Draco.

"Let's go!" said Andromeda.

"Can Jade come?" Beck asked.

"Sure." She grinned.

"Welcome to the Mogao cave! Here you can see a lot of things from history. Like Andy Mars, Ruby Manchester and other things too!" A person said on the speaker.

It was a dark, depressing, dusty and gloomy cave. There was a ginormous book shelf next to a painting of a Buddha.

"Hmm. . . this looks interesting!" Beck said as he pulled three books at a time.

Then he slipped and fell down a secret passageway.

Jade was talking to other people asking them where the restroom was so she could fix her makeup.

Andromeda saw Beck fell and told Jade.

"Let's go in!" Jade whispered.

"Okay!" Andromeda replied.

Jade and Andromeda sat down and had to slide down the secret passageway.

"Hey guys!" Beck said in a calm, normal voice.

"Are you okay?" Jade asked.

"Yeah!" he replied.

"Welcome all!" a strange guy said while he walked out. "I am Max Thunder Draco, and I was one of the people who created this place. I created this secret passage way and there is no way out. Even if there is you'll never figure it out! Oh by the way my last name Draco is Latin for dragon."

"How old are you?" asked Beck.

"One and a half millennia and a bit more years old." He said while touching the walls.

"What the heck!" Andromeda said with a shock.

"Wait! I know that picture on the book shelf. It is Andy Mars." Jade said. "She was the founder of this place."

"What!" Max Thunder shouted, "Andy did not find it, I did." He spoke.

"You know Andy Mars?" Jade asked.

"Andy, do you have anything to say about this?" Max Thunder asked.

"Why are you looking at Andromeda?" Beck asked.

"Wait, is Andromeda Andy Mars?" Jade asked curiously.

"Yep!" Andromeda said.

"But your name is Andromeda Jane Draco!" Beck said.

“My name Is Andromeda Mars Draco” Andromeda said.

“What about your middle name Jane?” Jade asked.

“Well, my name is two words. I am Andromeda Jane, or Andy Jane. So, my full name is Andromeda Jane Mars Draco.” Andromeda explained.

“Let us out of here Max Thunder!” Beck cried.

“Yeah!” Jade said.

“Wait! The books! That was how we got in; maybe they are the way to get out!” “Let’s try it!” Beck said.

So, Jade took a green, red, blue, and pink book and threw it at the wall. So did Beck as he took a brown, black, and yellow book and threw them too.

Then a rock climb wall appeared. Jade climbed up first Beck followed, then Max and Andy Jane.

Once they all got up back to the surface. The passage collapsed behind them. “Well, the passage died!” Andy Jane said. “I am so sorry I betrayed you and lied to other people who think ‘Andy Mars’ found the Magao caves, but it was you.” Andy Jane said sadly while looking at Max Thunder.

“Wait! Were you brothers and sisters?” Beck asked.

“Yep! A long time ago!” Max said.

“Now too!” Andy Jane said.

# Magao Grottoes

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Prete, Sara – 8*

In a small city in China, there was a little school, in a poor village far away. This school was called Language of life primary school and this week the year fives were going on a field trip to visit the Mogao Grottoes.

When a boy named Jack found out that he was going on a field trip to the Mogao Grottoes he was very irritated as he felt that this was a waste of a trip. Jack was a tall boy with jet black hair that often covered his eyes, he also had jade-like eyes and freckles.

So in order to evade this trip, Jack tried his best to stay home instead of spending the day in a boring landmark. The night before the field trip the motivated student stayed up all night devising a plan to pretend he was sick at school and have the school nurse send him back home forcing him to miss the bus and the field trip. While making his master plan Jack slowly fell asleep

“BEEP BEEP BEEP”, the blaring alarm noises rang through Jack's ears as he woke up. Barely awake he glanced towards his alarm clock to check the time. Jack was shocked because the clock read 7:45 meaning he missed the school bus.

Since he missed the bus, Jack's mom Rosa drove him to school. Unfortunately, since he slept in and had to be driven by his mom, Jack couldn't pretend to be sick, meaning that he would have to suffer through this boring field trip.

Like all the other student's Jack boarded the bus. After hearing his teacher ramble and over exaggerate the wonders of the Grottoes Jack dozed off.

Jack arose to the sudden halt of the bus; they had finally arrived in JiuQuan China, home of the Mogao Grottoes. Jack and his classmates got off the bus and the huge Chinese architecture of the Grottoes shadowed Jack. He looked up amazed to see the bright red colours and beautiful swirls and curls along with the structure.

Jack walked inside the Grottoes and entered the “lobby” and Jack was surprisingly amazed from what he had seen. He was left mouth open by the jade designs, the beautiful drawings and scriptures on the walls, and finally the huge terracotta statue basking in the middle of all this beauty.

As Jack started exploring the beautiful jade “lobby” of the Grottoes Jack started to hear a voice coming from the “authorised personnel only” section. This voice was calling to him, as it took control of him to walk towards the closed area but as Jack wandered in more and more, he started to get further and further away from his group.

Jack slowly approached the steel doors, he pulled the huge steel door open and stepped inside. “SLAM” the door behind him closed shut, trapping him inside, unexpected and unaware Jack took a step forward...then another...then another. As he was walking he heard a “click” behind him. He turned around immediately to see who was behind him, but unexpectedly the floor underneath him collapsed.

Jack fell straight down into a small pool of water which cushioned his fall. After Jack's vision had cleared from the water he tried to assess where he was. Jack was taken by surprise by the detailed design of the cavern he had fallen into. He turned around only to be faced with a huge figure. Jack screamed. But after taking a second glance Jack noticed that the figure wasn't a person... But a terracotta statue much like the ones he saw in the lobby.

Jack took a step back, not taking his eyes off the terracotta figure. But unfortunately for him, he spent too much of his attention on the terracotta figure and slipped on a sheet of silk. When he fell down he took his moment of unawareness to take a look at his surroundings.

Jack had expected to see some dirt, dust and sand, seeing as these grottoes haven't been fully explored yet and were probably very dirty. Truth be told, he was right but those three things weren't what caught his eye first, it was the beautiful jade articles, the magnificent silk sheets and the breathtaking stacks and stacks of precious metals.

But while admiring the riches he had just found, and basking in his own glory, Jack realised that he ought to get back or else people would notice that he was missing. So Jack started looking for a way out, but the more he searched the less he could find, and the more he walked the more he heard "click...click...click".

In the beginning, Jack thought it was in his head but as soon as Jack sat down hopeless, with no clear signs of escape. The thought occurred to him, that this room might be booby trapped too, at that exact moment...the floor collapsed...again.

Then Jack started to fall, more and more and more. He thought he was going to be stuck in this bottomless pit forever until he saw something he didn't want to see...not in this situation at least. Jack had caught sight of the floor, and just like any normal human, he braced for impact. Only to land on the cold, hard...bus seat.

"Hey Jack, it's time to go," the teacher called, "you wouldn't wanna miss the field trip". Jack smiled "no sir I would never dream of it".

# An Unexpected Visit to the Tang Palace

*International College Hong Kong Kindergarten and Primary, Tsang, Abi – 10*

Ying lived in a small village by the Daghe River which was very close to the Mogao Grottoes. She would always go to visit her brother, who was a devoted monk there, and he would let her explore the caves and its new paintings. It never failed to impress her. Every time she visited, there were monks working on different paintings. Although she went there so often, it was still full of surprises. That is, new paint colours would be discovered from extracts of vegetables grown in different parts of the world that were traded along the Silk Road. Camels from faraway lands of the Turks would come into the city for trading with the locals, which mainly involved different types of food and of course the famous fine silk related merchandise.

One day, whilst she was exploring the Grottoes, something caught her eyes. She then instructed her brother, Xiao Yan, to come to look. Whilst she led him to the secret room, he looked at her with suspicion. They were about to enter the spiritual room which was out of bound to all lower-level monks. As they opened the thick wooden bolted door, Ying and Xiao Yan were so shocked that they almost appeared frozen...

All of a sudden, both of them were being pushed to the ground and then tied up. Ying managed to look around the room before being blindfolded. A group of children were kidnapped. There were shouting and crying coming from the victims. Several kidnappers were wearing military uniforms whilst one of them was dressed as a monk.

Xiao Yan asked Ying quietly to feel around for sharp objects. Ying felt a small sharp stone with her legs and kicked them over towards the direction of her brother's whisper. Xiao Yan managed to free himself. Whilst trying to free the other children, Ying heard footsteps coming towards the room. The kidnappers must have heard the noise that they made and charged into the room. Unarmed and feeling scared, Ying and her brother decided to fight back. Xiao Yan fought hard and managed to grab some hard objects in the poorly lit room to smash them against the kidnappers' heads. Just as they were celebrating their triumph, their happiness slowly turned to disappointment as they found all the valuables in the room were completely destroyed, namely sculptures, paintings, and jades.

"We are in much trouble," Xiao Yan turned to her sister, "The chief monk would expel me for sure."

They heard a groan from one of the tied-up victims and freed him. Unlike the other children in their dirty ragged clothes, this person was dressed in fine silk. "Are you hurt?" Ying asked him.

"Thank you so much for saving me. I'm unharmed," he replied

"Why did they kidnap you?" asked Xiao Yan.

"I'm guessing they are trying to use me to bargain with the Emperor," he said.

As confused as it gets, Ying asks the boy who is dressed in fine silk clothing in front of her "And you are?"

"I am Prince Yinong, the Emperor is my father," said the boy calmly.

Ying could not believe what she just heard so she turned to her brother and asked, "Did he just say he was the Prince?"

Her brother, who was as shocked as she was, said "That's what I heard too, I think."

While in complete disbelief Xiao Yan looked around the room and noticed all the damage that the kidnappers had made, and worried about getting expelled.

"How are we going to fix all the damage? Will you be in big trouble?" Ying asked her brother.

“Did you two not understand what I had just said?” laughed the boy in fine silk wear, “I am Prince Yinong, second son of the emperor. I will take care of all the damage and in fact, I will arrange to restore this whole Grottoes. I would also like to invite you two to come to the palace and spend a few days as my guest of honor in order to show my gratitude for saving me.”

“Wow! A few days in the palace!” Ying and Xiao Yan thought to themselves. “What should we wear, all our clothes are torn and have holes!” Prince Yinong reassured them that they would have nothing to worry about. Xiao Yan escorted all of them to see the chief monk at Mogao Grottoes. The chief monk was not that surprised to see Prince Yinong amongst the kidnapped children as he received words days earlier from the emperor that the rebellion army had kidnapped his son and was planning to use his son for bargaining chips.

After traveling back to the Palace which is heavily guarded by the Imperial Army, Prince Yinong showed Ying and Xiao Yan around the palace which was so grand and massive that after spending three whole days there, they have only explored a tenth of the area.

The food in the palace was also amazing, they had chefs that were responsible for one specific cuisine for different meals of the day. One peculiar observation was that the emperor would not touch any of the dishes until someone had tried the dishes for him, this was to prevent the emperor being poisoned. Ying whispered to her brother, “I wouldn’t mind having this job and I will even do it for free!”

Three days passed very quickly. At last, it was time to say goodbye to Prince Yinong and leave the palace.

“Before you two go I have one last surprise,” said Prince Yinong whilst he slowly pulled two gold medals from his pocket. “This is a medal of honor to show how grateful I am for saving me, and with this medal you are granted permission to enter the palace anytime you want.”

This was the most amazing gift Ying has ever received. Just like the old legend says, "with the Mogao Caves, anything can happen.”

# Once Upon a Buddha

*Kau Yan School (Primary), Chan, Mong Chi Molly – 10*

‘Class! Calm down! If I hear another peep from you, he or she can’t go on the school trip!’ shouted Ms. Wong. The poor little lady was yelling so loudly that she looked as red as a tomato.

Carlos’s class had gone on a school trip to the Mogao Grottoes, which they have been learning in history class. The whole grade was super excited to see the art the cave contains and have been talking about it nonstop.

On the day of the trip, after riding the bus for a long time, they finally arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. Carlos and his class were fascinated. His jaw dropped when he saw the seven-storey tall cave decorated like a Chinese temple with red roofs. ‘Wow, it looks magnificent!’

The class wandered around and Carlos was making notes and was fascinated by the wall paintings and sculptures of many Buddha’s. While Carlos was busy studying a colourful wall painting of Buddhas, he noticed that one was painted with a red star painted on its forehead, so he called to his mate Owen ‘Come look!’ but while they were checking out the unusual Buddha, a kid in their class, Finn, barged in and shoved them away.

‘What are you guys looking at?’ he demanded.

He then spotted the Buddha with the red star on his forehead and asked. ‘Will something happen?’ Then, as quick as lightning, he threw his shoe at the Buddha.

And the next thing they know, they’re falling.

Carlos screamed and screamed as they fell, but it turned out that it was a short fall, and something soft happened to cushion them when they hit the floor.

‘Woah, this is really creepy,’ said Owen.

The room that they fell into was deep underground and dark. The walls are made of stone blocks and cobwebs hung everywhere. Suddenly, Carlos yelled, ‘Come here! I think I just found a door!’

Carlos and Owen used all of their might to push open the door, but they couldn’t. The door was stuck. Suddenly, Finn ran up and kicked the door open. ‘You guys are weak!’

They went inside the door and what they saw blew their mind. Inside were three statues made of pure gold and wearing accessories made with precious stones. Next, there were dusty shelves topped with stacks of papers that had turned yellow, accessories made of gold, and many other things that looked really valuable. But out of all things, a rusty old box on the corner of the shelf caught Carlos’s eye. When he opened it, he discovered that there was a piece of paper with a drawing of a map of the Mogao Grottoes. He quickly stuffed it in his pocket and ran to find the others. He found them picking up the gold accessories and trying them on. ‘We’re going to be rich!’

‘I think it would be wiser not to take them. We should leave them,’ said Carlos.

The others sighed and put them back. But now, the matter was that they could not climb back out of the hole they fell into.

‘Maybe we can see if there’s another exit,’ said Owen.

Surprisingly, as they scanned around the room, they found another door leading to a tunnel.

After walking for a long time in the pitch-black tunnel, they finally saw sunlight. And there was a rope that led back up. When they reached the top, they discovered that they were inside an empty room in the Mogao Grottoes, so they began to walk back out to find their class. When they were about to walk out of the room, Carlos heard a loud thump. It was a trap. All in a second, a giant boulder dropped out of nowhere and sealed the door.

‘Help! Help! We’re trapped!’

Even with all three of them trying, they still can't push away the boulder blocking their path. They tried calling for help but no one happened to pass by. When they're feeling like giving up, Carlos suddenly had an idea. He ordered Owen and Finn to take out the rope that they climbed up on, and tied it around the boulder.

Once it was done, he said, 'On the count of three, pull as hard as you can. One, two, three!' and the boulder began to move. It opened a little hole wide enough for them to climb out. When they reached outside, they quickly out and found their classmates.

After they talked and explained to their class, although leaving out the part where they found the secret room. Suddenly Ms. Wong yelled out in a panicked voice, 'Class! Help me find Finn! He is missing again!' The class all ran off and searched for Finn.

Carlos thought, 'What if Finn went back to the room?'

So, he and Owen went and gave the Buddha a hard kick. Down in the room., they heard Finn shouting for help, but they couldn't find him.

'Maybe there's another room somewhere,' said Carlos.

He suddenly remembered the piece of paper written with a map. But Carlos was very tired and decided to lean on a wall to rest. Suddenly, the wall spun around and trapped him in a room behind the wall.

'Carlos is that you?' said a voice.

'Finn! The whole class is very worried about you!' said Carlos.

After Owen got Carlos and Finn out, the three of them went to climb back up. They stood on top of each other and Carlos grabbed the rope from above to let the others climb up. When they are on the ground above Finn, tell the other two why he went back down.

'I just want to take one last look at the treasure room, but when I sat down, the wall gave in and I was trapped.' As they were leaving the Mogao Grottoes, they looked back at the cave, thought about the adventures they've had today, wondered when they would come here and discover more secrets.

# The Adventures of Mogao Caves: Apsara

*Kau Yan School (Primary), Hom, Hang Tung Audrey – 11*

“We got to go in and check this out,” Grace yells to his brother Greg and runs into the small ancient-like Chinese temple. Incense is burning next to Buddha figures and a monk approaches them. “Hello. We’re new to the neighborhood and wanted to visit your temple,” Grace says to the monk.

“Welcome. I sense that you are here on a special journey,” replies the monk.

“Are you from China? In Chinese history class, we just read about the Mogao Grottoes. It’s so interesting. It began in 366 AD along the Silk Road and they called it the Cave of the Thousand Buddhas, spanning over many dynasties, including the Sui, Tang and Song. I’ve never been to Dunhuang, Gansu but they say it was the heart of trade, religion, and culture. Mogao, or ‘the high place of the desert’, continued for a thousand years with about 500 painted caves or grottoes, over 2,000 painted sculptures and over 50,000 cultural relics. It was a center of Buddhist art with influences of the East and West. It showed us so much about the beliefs, culture, arts and daily life of the Chinese people at that time. It’s a time capsule and treasure all in one,” Grace says in excitement and intrigue, sounding like her teacher.

The monk kindly answers, “Yes, I’ve traveled a far way. Indeed, Mogao carries many wonders and secrets yet to be discovered...’Om Mani Padme Hum’. Feel free to explore.”

Greg, being naughty as usual, runs off into the next room as Grace chases after him, “Wait for me!”

“This is cool! We can play hide and seek here and I bet you’ll never find me here. Tagged, you’re it!” yelled Greg as he gives Grace a shove and runs off. He barges into a room with doors of golden lotus on it.

“Got you!” as Grace jumps out and grabs Greg’s hoodie. He grabs onto the small table and a porcelain jar hits the ground, sending up a cloud of golden dust. “Look what you did now! We better let the monk know and clean this up.” They cleaned up the broken vase and headed out but could not find the monk. Outside they heard galloping horses and went out to see. “What was that?”

At the door of the temple, they looked out and were shocked. The city street was gone and they saw a big desert with an oasis in the far distance. The horse galloping sounds got louder and louder.

“Quickly follow me, now” said a lovely voice. Grace and Greg follow the lady going back inside the temple and go down a dark secret corridor and come out after a short walk.

“You’re beautiful and your outfit is like the one I saw in my Chinese history book. What is happening? Where are we? How did we get here?” asked Grace. Greg is frightened and stays close behind Grace.

“I am one of the fairies called Apsara or you can call me Feitian. You are safe as we are in the Mogao Cave and they are gone. Those were raiders from the evil lord MingTai. They are looking for the sacred vase of the 1000 Hand Buddha. I sense that you are sent here from the Heavens,” explained Feitian. “Oh no, they’ve stolen the vase! We must get it back if we are to send you back to heaven.”

Grace and Greg, still a bit in disbelief, have so many questions, “Mogao Cave! This must be a dream! Okay, we’ll help as we want to wake up and be back home before it gets too late. Who built this cave? Why does it have so many drawings and statues?”

“In 366 AD a monk named Le Zun came here at the cliffs of Mingsha Mountain and when the heavens showed him the image of a thousand Buddhas through the light of the sun, he decided to build the first grotto here as a place to cultivate himself according to the teachings of Buddha. Over a thousand years, Buddhism flourished in this area as more monks came to cultivate themselves and to preach Dharma to the merchants who passed through the Silk Road. The statues, fresco murals, and manuscripts all show Buddhist thoughts and philosophy in bright colors and details,” Feitian explains.

Grace takes a close look at the paintings in the wall and recognizes, "Feitian, I see you in so many of the pictures. You are so beautiful, graceful and you can fly and play music! I can see you being helpful, bringing pleasure through music and accompanying Buddha and so many people."

"Yes, we must go now and get the vase. I have a plan," Feitian says. They came to where the raiders were resting under a tree. Feitian plays her musical instrument to get the attention of raiders and in no time the music puts them asleep. Grace quietly approaches the raiders and finds the vase. Greg trips and wakes up the raiders and they chase after them.

Feitian springs to the sky, flying above the raiders and showers them with a lotus flower with a mysterious smell. They all fall asleep onto the ground while Grace and Greg race back to the cave. "That was close and thank—you for saving us," says Grace.

"You two have been brave. Thank—you for helping to get the vase back." Feitian plays a soft tone and Grace and Greg fall asleep.

"Om Mani Padme Hum...Wake up. Time to go home," said the monk. Grace and Greg woke up and started heading home.

"I had the strangest dream," says Greg. They arrive home tired. Grace opens her bag and finds a white vase with a lotus flower in it. She cannot stop thinking about Feitian and the bravery that she gave her to act, all the while protecting them; we must act with grace and bravery. Feitian and Mogao Caves were a true wonder.

# The Greatest Treasure

*Kau Yan School (Primary), Liu, Elan – 12*

The grand clock of Ember Mansion was ticking nonstop, as time passed by, John Ember and his younger brother, Mark Ember were reading on the grand Mogao Grottoes, the ancient temple in the cave near an oasis where traders and travelers rest. John was ambitious and he wanted to have all the riches in the Mogao Grottoes, but going there was difficult so they asked their king, King Edward VII, to help them.

Edward thought carefully, with his hand constantly swiping his long grey beard. Suddenly, he replied, “Right.....Right. So you wish me to offer you 100 men and 11 of the Grand Generals of the Empire, for a temple? And you also want to go the long way to prevent a spiritual monster?” John replied nervously, “Your majesty, it is no ordinary temple, the roads are made out of gold and the rooms are full of gold, silver, diamonds, amethyst and much much more. And I will give you half of the riches.” Edward had a sneaky grin on his face and replied, “Great! I expect barrels and barrels of riches. Wait, no! You will go with me there, and so, you will not go away.”

On the next Tuesday, John and his little ‘crusade’ set off for the Mogao Grottoes, everyone was full of excitement and filled with glee, they wanted the treasure and will risk everything for it. John was on the giant ship that was to land on British Raj with everyone else, every of the 114 people was excited. John was excited he kept running and running around the ship to find his bookworm brother, Mark. John suddenly bumped into Mark while Mark was reading a book called “Mysteries And Prophecies of the Ancient Ruins” John shouted enthusiastically, “Oi, bookworm! What are you reading?” Mark replied in a cold tone, “Mysteries and Prophecies of the Ancient Ruins, about the Mogao Grottoes.” John replied, “Yeah, you can read more about your Foggy Rottos, we’re off for adventure! Get ready, we’re landing at British Raj!” When they arrived at the shore of the British Raj, their troops continued forward and forward, people were cheering, treasure was here! They all endured through the long roads and finally, they arrived at the humongous and glorious entrance of grand Mogao Grottoes.

They all rushed into the grand temple and John, Mark and Edward’s knights, Tomhold, Jax, Jace, Lucian, Jamie, Adam, Ben, Connor, Regulus and Harold. Harold was the champion of the knights, he always took the treasure everywhere, the golden statues, the amethyst necklaces, everything that is worth something great and he wanted it, he will get it. He was greedy and he liked riches. While they moved to the second room, there was a robot-like figure, it moved and moved, and it pointed to Connor, Connor shaked nonstop, he was very very scared. Then, the floor started to fall and Connor screamed loudly, and he fell into the deep dungeons. Suddenly, they heard a loud “SPLAT!” Then everyone there was splashed with blood. Mark screamed in terror and Mark begged them to go, “We should leave this sacred place! In my book, we must leave! Or destroy the grand blue jewel, or we will all die! There will be more Connors and then, we will ALL DIE!” Harold blew a raspberry and replied confidently, “Nah! Connor was just an accident.” And they moved on, the 13 men searched everywhere for the riches afterwards, not feeling sad for their comrade’s death.

Then, when they entered the next room, it locked off from every other room, the people trembled greatly, Harold laughed, “You are afraid? There is nothing to be afraid of! Let’s go find a way out!” But then, they were separated into smaller rooms, and suddenly, sand poured into 6 of the rooms slowly and slowly, the sound of the falling of the sand made people more scared than ever. After that, only 7 came out and the body came tumbling. John, Mark, Edward, Tomhold, Adam, Jax and Harold were surviving. Everyone except Harold wanted to leave, Jax shouted, “Let’s go!” But Harold tripped Jax and his head was pouring with blood after hitting a stair. Edward was furious, he shouted, “THIS IS A MUTINY! I FORCE YOU TO LET US GO!” Harold laughed maniacally, “Force? You force me? I have all the power and you have none.” Harold evilly tied them up, gave them goblets of water to ‘drink’ and went into the grand statue room, where the blue Crystal was.

John tried to free the others, but suddenly, when they were freed, Adam drank all the water, but it was laced with poison and “THUD!” He fell onto the ground. Edward was furious, he clenched his fists angrily, and swore revenge. They all went to the statue room to confront Harold. They walked in and saw the blue jewel and they fought with Harold. Harold beat the king in his eye, but John kicked him in the feet and he fell into a pit with spikes. And Mark threw the Crystal into the hole. And recited the poem, “Two dragon-fire and a king; travel far into the land of the dragons; a cave of the lost men with jewels and rings; hide the darkest secrets of men. In the team there was a dent;

they grew suspicious of one another; the one with six and eight in front; takes a treasure not to be taken. The king and his knights died before another; but there were four that will preserve; the four never betrayed one another; and truth is their true intent. Though there was no treasure there; though Golden Goblets, Golden Fruits; better than the other rares; friends and family is the greatest treasure, cherished in everyone's heart." John said, "Wow! Is it a prophecy? It is beautiful!"

They left the grottoes with the greatest treasure but their hand was not full, no bats were filled, for they gained a new friendship.

# The Mystery of the Mogao Caves

*Kau Yan School (Primary), Ng, Yuet Sum Caylie – 12*

The first beam of sun hit my face, I groaned and slowly crawled to the bathroom with my blanket on. As I brushed my teeth, I thought about the strange dream that I had. In my dream, there was a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light, inside a cave. What was that? I picked up my phone and called my friend, Jackson who's a geographer. "Hey, Jackson...I just had this dream...it's a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathed in golden light, inside a cave..." Jackson asked, "Oh, are you interested? I have some time, how about we go on a trip?" I answered happily, "Sure!" I then provided more details to Jackson and searched about buddhas.

We then decided to go to China, as it's one of the places with a lot of Buddha statues. Jackson and I met up at the airport and started our amazing journey! On the way to China, the plane assistants suddenly told us all to prepare to crash! I was so scared, my hands and legs were shaking. Jackson held my hands tightly, "It's going to be fine, here, wear this suit first" luckily, we fell into a raging river.

The next thing I knew, I was in a soft bed. Jackson came over and yelled, "Caylie! You're finally awake!" I spoke with a raspy voice, "Where am I?" Jackson replied with a smile, "Some villagers saved us!" A few days later, I recovered fully. The leader of the villager came over with a kind smile, "I heard you guys were trying to find out about Buddhas, right? Well, there was this tale that's from a long time ago. There was once a monk who found a cave somewhere at an oasis in the desert. Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims dug more caves and spent their time creating sacred art and literature." He then opened up a dusty old book, pointing at one of the drawings. "This is a thousand hand Buddha..."

"Jackson! I think this is it! This is exactly the same one in my dreams!" The old man smiled and continued to say, "Don't be too happy yet. We don't know where these caves lie nor if the tale is real. But...if you really want to discover more, maybe head out to the south area, where there's more probability." "Okay! Thanks a lot!" "Oh, and be aware of the weather, some mountains near us have been collapsing." "Okay! Jackson! Let's go!"

We continued our journey, as we were walking towards the nearest transport which was still far away, a sandstorm arrived. Jackson and I were blown away by the strong wind. BOOM! A few mountains collapsed...wait...what was that? I pinched Jackson, "Jackson! Look! There's a cave!" We were both shocked. What deep secrets lie in this cave? Due to my curiosity, I grabbed Jackson and ventured in.

We went inside and...wow! "Is this a city or something! This building is massive!"

I ran around, not noticing the paintings and books around. Jackson came over and held me near to him, "don't run, you might get lost, this cave is massive. Stick together." Jackson then pointed at some of the paintings, "These paintings are so old! Look at the fine paintings though...these might be from 1000 years ago!"

After looking at all the paintings and taking photos of them, we continued walking. As we walked deeper into the cave, it was pitch black. Jackson opened a flashlight and we were both amazed by what was in front of us. "Jackson! We found it! This is it! This is the Buddha!" We admired the Buddha for quite a while until something much more amazing caught our eyeballs. It was different from the painting outside. The carvings on the stone walls!

"Jackson...what are these paintings?" Jackson examined it closely, "These should be drawings about the Silk Road! Also, look at how the art improved from century to century!" After 3 hours of exploring the cave, we walked out with a bright smile on our faces.

Up to today, I still cannot forget this breathtaking and exciting journey! We reported this to the government and after scholars identified the paintings and sculptures, they were actually from a thousand years ago! They also found the oldest dated, printed book in the world! We then decided on the name of the cave "Mogao Caves". It's just crazy that the Buddha in my dream is real! How can this happen? There is no logical explanation. What other more stories are behind this cave? The mystery is folded in the centuries.

# Journey to Enlightenment

*Kau Yan School (Primary), Yu, Ka Hei Jayden – 11*

In an aisle surrounded by white walls, Ming sat on the hospital bench and stared at his medical report. “Stage 4 pancreatic cancer... It is too late for me to be cured. I must take this remaining time of mine to do something adventurous...” Ming thought to himself. As he left the hospital, he picked up his phone and booked the air tickets to fly to Dunhuang.

A bus was on its way to the Han Great Wall, and Zhangye Danxia was its last stop. There were stops in various cities along the way; Mogao Caves was one of them. When Ming got on the shuttle bus, it was packed with most of its seats being taken and had air conditioning blowing through it completely. Although the bus was filled with passengers, the place was mainly noiseless because almost everyone on the bus was a stranger to one another. As the bus slowly moved from his hotel in Downtown Dunhuang to the grottoes, he watched the sandy scenes outside of the window as he bit on his *roujiamo* (sandwich). The grease of the lamb filling tingled on the tip of his tongue, but he wasn't really in the mood to enjoy the delicacy he was tasting. As the bus halted, Ming squirmed out of the bus and drew fresh air into his lungs. “So here I am, finally at the Mogao Caves.”

Entering the Mogao Grottoes, he was surrounded by the great art that was created a thousand years ago. Ming slowly walked into the caves one by one, with his knowledge of art history, he looked at the murals closely and appreciated the art in the caves. As though he was fulfilled by recognizing the jataka tales inscribed on the walls, Ming let out a sigh and mumbled under his breath, “Although I can finally witness these beautiful works of art, I cannot stop thinking about my medical report. All these murals seemed like insignificant symbols to me.”

As he was too concentrated on his thoughts, he lost track of his directions. When he lifted his head, he froze like one of the sculptures in the caves. Right in front of him, he saw a big buddha reclining on a big piece of stone and a monk was standing in front of the Buddha and was mumbling a prayer. After the monk finished his prayer, he noticed that Ming was standing behind him and asked him, “Young man, why do you have your brows knitted?” Ming replied to the monk, “I am having stage 4 cancer, and I'm afraid of dying.” The monk looked at him sympathetically and told him to look at the buddha sculpture in the cave with him.

“Young man, please look at this reclining buddha.”

Ming asked in confusion, “What is so special about this Buddha?”

“This reclining buddha recreates the story of the historical buddha reaching Nirvana. A few thousand years ago, the Indian prince who started Buddhism died mortally and became enlightened. In the murals, some figures are happy, envious, and sad — this shows that you can see death from different perspectives. For instance, if you miss the person who died, you will feel sad. But if you see that person as having been freed from the suffering cycle of life, like getting sick or old, you will feel happy for them.” As the monk told the story to Ming, he realized that death is not an entirely negative experience and he also wishes to be enlightened after death.

Ming stood in a bustling district where it was packed with pedestrians. He bent down and handed a homeless person a lunchbox. “Thank you sir!” said the homeless person as he smiled and started to gobble the lunchbox. Ming had mixed feelings towards it, on one hand he was happy because he could see smiles on the homeless people's faces when he helped them, but on the other hand, he felt nervous since he only had limited time left. But when he remembered the journey to Dunhuang, he felt relieved.

In an aisle surrounded by white walls, Ming sat on the hospital bench and waited for his appointment with his doctor. Even though his body had become weaker and it ached, he felt thankful for what he had and he no longer feared this white hospital room.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kingston International School, Cheung, Chloe – 9*

Chloe was an eight year old student from Hong Kong. She was shy and reserved, but enjoyed reading. Until one day an unbelievable thing happened to her on the way to school. Out of nowhere, a metal arm shot out of a narrow lane that was dark and dusty. The arm grabbed Chloe before she could respond. Chloe was petrified and wanted to scream, but nothing came out! The Robot had blocked Chloe's mouth when she tried to call out for help.

The Robot said, "If I release my hand, please don't scream." Chloe hesitantly nodded and agreed. The Robot then slowly let go. Chloe was very shook-up and puzzled. She stuttered quietly and asked what was going on.

The Robot explained, "I work for Dr Cross, he is a scientist researching the Mogao Grottoes in Central China. Unfortunately some important artifacts went missing during the Christmas Holiday." Chloe was even more confused than before, because she was the one chosen to help. To find out more, she had to see Dr Cross. Chloe was anxious and said to Robot, "No, I cannot! I am not the hero that you need!" Robot answered, "But you must help. You are special and you are the only one that can survive this mission. Dr Cross can see the future and he knows that you will definitely be alright." Chloe was on the fence on what to do. On one side she was curious about what would happen, on the other side she was scared and was not prepared for the adventure. She pondered for a very long time, then she finally agreed. She knew that Dr Cross was counting on her and letting him down wasn't a choice.

Chloe was still apprehensive but luckily, Robot reassured her that nothing bad was going to happen. It was time for goodbye, she took a deep breath and stepped in.

She was greeted with a corridor filled with numbered doors. A real life dinosaur appeared without warning. In shock Chloe shouted, "How did you become a real dinosaur when a second ago you were still my little toy!?" Dini smiled and replied, "Robot turned me into a dinosaur because he thinks you need a sidekick to help you. Robot also instructed me what to do!"

They found room 378 and slowly opened the door. There was another portal in front of them, but this time it was in the ground. They had to jump through it, which landed them on Mars. Dr Cross was waiting for them.

With a welcoming smile, Dr Cross calmly introduced himself, "I have been waiting for you for a long time, I am very relieved that you have agreed to help us." Chloe and Dini found out that there was a terrible monster, Monslar had stolen the treasures from the Mogao Grottoes. They learned that the Grottoes were abandoned after the fourteenth century, but people were unaware of 50,000 documents and hundreds of paintings hidden in Cave 17. But in the early 20th century, a monk named himself the keeper of the treasures, but later he sold it to a British archeologist.

The archeologist was researching in his lab, when Monslar decided to sneak through the window and steal all the paintings and documents. When he came out, he discovered everything was missing and there was a trail of animal footprints. Luckily he was able to contact Dr Cross for help via time machine.

Dr Cross said, "We must help the archeologist retrieve the stolen things." Chloe asked who the archeologist was but didn't get a clear response. Dr Cross said, "He specifically asked me for your and Dini's help, so I need you both."

Chloe and Dini went through the time traveling portal and arrived at the Mogao Caves. Chloe looked around and saw temples and caves. She was amazed by the architecture.

Suddenly, she heard a growl and they ran to the Mogao Grottoes to hide. The monster crashed in the Mogao Grottoes with his mighty horns. Luckily Dini had a fabulous plan. Dini belted a ferocious roar and leaped towards the Monslar. Chloe was shocked to see Dini so fierce and she was left speechless. The monster and Dini started a deadly battle. Helplessly, Chloe knew she couldn't just stand and watch. She used a lasso and tangled the monster.

Unfortunately, the monster kicked Chloe and she fell unconscious to the floor. Dini saw what had happened. Filled with rage and fire in his eyes, he flew up and defeated the monster once and for all. Then he rushed over to Chloe and checked if she was ok. He gently patted her little head and luckily she started to move. Chloe slowly got up and

embraced her dinosaur. Chloe said to Dini, "Let's ask Dr Cross where the stolen artifacts are!" They went to the place where the portal was last opened and waited patiently. Dr. Cross appeared, they shouted, " Dr. Cross, we have defeated Monslar, but how do we retrieve the artifacts?" Dr Cross answered, "Legend says that a brave dinosaur and a girl will find the artifacts if they follow the glow." Confused, Chloe and Dini scanned around and saw a dim light faintly shining behind an old tree. They instantly ran towards it and found the artifacts buried underneath. They placed the artifacts back in Cave 17 and they were sent back to Mars.

Dr Cross said to Chloe, " Good job Chloe Rick Stein! You have saved the artifacts from the evil hands of Monslar." Moments later Chloe and Dini felt a tingling sensation and they were transported back to the present. They landed in a bush by the sidewalk. Dini was once again just a toy. Chloe brushed herself off and continued her journey to school. When she arrived, her history teacher announced that they were starting a new unit about the Mogao Grottoes and Marc Aurel Stein, the British archeologist. Chloe's face was in complete shock!

# My Magical Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

*Kingston International School, Huang, Ethan – 9*

Today I went to the movie theater to watch a movie called <Adventure at Mogao Grottoes>. I was so excited because I looked forward to this movie for a long time. While I was enjoying the movie, suddenly a strange bright light flashed into my eyes. When I opened my eyes after the flash, I was in a whole new world.

“Where am I?” I looked around, only saw some strange dressed workers digging caves. I asked all of the workers where I was, but nobody had any reactions, just like they couldn’t see me and hear me. My heart was beating so fast cause I had no idea where I was. So I just walked around and hoped I could find something. “Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes!” A sound broke the peace of quiet. I looked around and found a Buddha smiling at me, with golden light shining at his back. The Buddha statue looks realistic. “Excuse me, who are you, did you just talk to me? Where am I? How could I go home?” “I am the biggest buddha here, I am 35.6 meters tall. You are now in cave 96. ” The Buddha gave me a pen, said: “Take this pen with you and enjoy your journey here, then you will find the answer.”

I walked around and saw a wall that had words on it: When was the Mogao Grottoes built? Then I realized why the Great Buddha gave me a pen, it was for writing answers! I remembered the first sentence I heard in the movie was: Mogao Grottoes was built in 366 AD. That is when the first cave started digging. It was a long time ago!

I kept walking, then I stopped at cave 126. A wall with words on it like last time: What material is Mogao Grottoes made of? I checked on a builder and saw them digging sculptures on a rock on a cliff and used some wood to build porches. Some of them painted the finished sculptures and drew pictures on the wall. So I answered: Everything has been dug on rocks, some wood and paint.

Then I moved on and saw the third challenge in cave 134: How many caves does Mogao Grottoes have? I spent a whole day counting and found out there are 750 caves there! Each cave has its own sculpture in the caves. Some of them were seriously damaged by natural disasters and some human behaviour. Some of them have been fixed, but they don’t look like the original ones anymore.

While I kept walking, I wondered: When could I go home? The fourth challenge appeared in cave 158. I was interested in this challenge: Which is the second biggest buddha here, how long is he? I saw a big Buddha sleeping there. He was closing his eyes and lying on his side. And beside him was a note: “Reclining Buddha (the second biggest buddha in the Mogao Grottoes, he was 15.8 meters long.) When I finished writing the answer, the strange bright light appeared again.

When I opened my eyes again, I found that I was sitting on my spot in the theater. “I’m back!” I shouted. ( I bet you can imagine what other people’s faces look like.) I ran out of the theater and can’t wait to share my magical trip with my friends.

Would you go to the theater to watch the movie <Adventure at Mogao Grottoes>? Maybe you will have a magical trip too!

## “Focus, George!”

*Korean International School, Bakshi, Uma – 9*

“Get up right now, George!” said Mum loudly. “We will be late for the bus,” she said. George, sitting on the couch in his pyjamas, ignored what his mum was saying and continued playing a game on his phone. George and his parents had travelled from Hong Kong to Dunhuang to see the Mogao caves during the Mid–Autumn festival break.

“George, if you are not quick enough, it will become too crowded and we will not get to see anything,” said Mum angrily. George shoved his phone into his pocket and went in to change his clothes. Once George finished changing, he plonked on the couch again to watch television. When his dad came into the room, he just looked at George. That was all it took to move George from the couch.

The bus was waiting outside. Mum held George’s hand tightly and pulled him towards the bus. He shook it off angrily. “George, are you coming or not? If you are not coming, then I have no choice but to drag you onto the bus,” she said. George ran onto the bus and his mum and dad followed. The moment George sat down he started playing a game on his phone. Dunhuang was in the Gobi Desert and had a very different climate than Hong Kong, which was a humid coastal city. Mum tried to show George how different Dunhuang was from Hong Kong, but George continued fiddling with his phone. “George, focus! How many times do I need to tell you to put away your phone when I am speaking to you? You are always distracted because of your phone. If you cannot focus, you will never be able to do well in anything!” George rolled his eyes and said, “Another sermon!” His dad gave him a stern glance and told him to put his phone away. It was a long journey from Dunhuang to the Mogao Visitor Centre, and George pulled out his phone to play games the moment his dad looked away. “I wonder how many times his hand reaches into his pocket in a day,” Dad said to Mum.

They bought tickets at the Mogao visitor centre. There they were shown two short movies about the Mogao Caves and the art in them. George found it very easy to look at screens, so he watched the movies intently. After that they travelled in a bus for twenty minutes during which Mum discussed the movies with George and Dad. “There are 735 caves and 492 out of them have Buddhist temple art that has thousands of square metres of murals and many sculptures,” said Mum. Dad was quite interested in the library cave which had more than 40,000 scrolls.

The tour guide said that he would show them eight caves out of which one would be the library cave. He took them first into the library cave. George’s parents became busy looking at the manuscripts. George got bored so he pulled out his phone and started playing his game and every time he got a point, there was a funny sound. Dad looked at him angrily. George pushed his phone into his pocket and sneaked out of the cave to finish a level in the game. He saw the entrance of another dark cave and walked inside. Turning down the volume of his phone he finished his level and jumped happily. He then walked out of the cave to join his parents when he realised that it was already dark outside. He had lost track of time while playing his game. George was terrified and couldn’t think of what to do next. He walked back inside and took his phone out of his pocket and called his mum. Mum shrieked, “George, where are you? We are looking for you!” But before George could answer, the battery died. George was so scared that he sat down and started sobbing. He sobbed so much that he fell asleep.

When he woke up, George took a second to realise where he was. “I am in the Mogao caves,” he remembered. George put his hand into his pocket to take out his phone. Then he realised that his phone had been discharged completely. He looked around at the darkness helplessly and saw a wall with a ray of moonlight shining on it. He walked up to the wall and observed some drawings. “So beautiful,” he thought. He remembered a mural that he had done with his friends on the school wall. It had taken them two weeks to finish it. “This must have taken years!” thought George. He walked back a few steps and saw that the whole cave was covered with intricate drawings and sculptures. “Amazing!” he whispered to himself.

The paintings had detailed drawings of people and animals and covered the whole cave. George thought about how much time and hard work it would have taken to create these drawings. The artist would have had to focus hard to make sure there were no mistakes.

“George, focus!” George remembered his mum’s words. “If I focus, one day I will become an artist. I must focus more intently from now on,” he thought. Just then, he heard voices outside, and someone shone a torch into the cave. “George!!” came his mum’s voice. “George, are you okay?” she asked in a scared voice. “Mum! Dad!” exclaimed George. “I am perfectly fine,” George said meekly but happily. “Mum, I was so scared!” Dad hugged George. George felt safe now.

On the way back to Dunhuang, George wouldn't stop talking about what happened in the cave and about the drawings. "I want to become a great artist, Mum," he said, "and I have realised what I need to stop doing to become one."

George's hand seldom went into his pocket again.

# A Gift from Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Chong, Shun Yan – 11*

“Hello?” “Helloelloelloello...” Having heard the endless echoes, I knew I was really deep inside the cave. Maybe I was way too focused on the attractive paintings on the walls, so I just went wherever there was a way through, not following my parents. It was then when I realised that the noisy sounds from strangers were gone. Dead silence came. I knew it was no use, no matter how loud I shouted and hurt my poor throat. They would not hear me if they were in such a noisy and faraway place. I tried to get out of the cave, but I kept returning back to the original cave several times. (I could recognise the same paintings and sculptures every turn) Was I going to spend the rest of my life here, where there were only gorgeous pictures on walls and statues? A miserable tear dropped onto the dusty floor.

A teensy-weensy voice whispered, “Hi, little girl, wah-wh-achoo! Ugh...what’s wrong?” I looked around, muttering, “I’m lost in this cave and I’m talking to myself. May as well spend the rest of my life here, eating my last piece of cracker.” The kind voice said, “Look at the Buddha Statue right behind you.” After that, I looked at the statue, with its mouth moving.

I stopped sobbing and thought, “Am I dreaming? Am I delirious with hunger?”

The Buddha Statue answered, “No, you’re not delirious with hunger. I’m Buddha. I wish I could help you, but I’m feeling a bit uncomfortable, the reason which I cannot figure out”.

I asked with pity, “Oh. Perhaps you’re itchy?”

Buddha replied, “I can’t feel anything, let alone itchiness.”

I guessed again. “Hmmm... do you have COVID-19?”

Buddha said, “I can’t even catch a cold. How can I possibly have COVID-19?”

So, I tried again. “Um... maybe you’re way too hungry. I have some tomato crackers here. Do you want some?”

Buddha responded, “I don’t have a stomach.”

I tried, and I tried, but nothing seemed to bother Buddha. “Is it the ‘things’ in your nose?” “I don’t have any.” “What about pimples?” “I can’t grow any.” “Maybe it’s your clothes?” “I’ve been wearing these all my life and they don’t bother me.” After several failures of guessing, I could tell it was getting late, and thought that my parents should be worried sick.

Exhausted, I sat on the floor and spoke wearily, “It’s... it’s too – too – achoo!” Thousands of specks of dust moved around the dark, dusky room. Suddenly, I stood up with a genius idea. “AHA! You’re way too dusty! Gosh, why

didn't I think of that before?" I used a tissue from my heavy backpack to wipe the statue. Every time I wiped off some dust, a golden light shimmered from Buddha. After I finally wiped off all the dust on Buddha, the statue's legs and arms opened swiftly, with its eyes opened wide, and its body flying above the pale-colour table. It shrieked, "I'M ALIVE!" After its sudden shriek, the tremendous echo remained. "ALIVE. ALIVE. ALIVE. ALIVE..."

I asked, "Um... can you do me a favour? Now that you're alive, can you show me the way out of here?" Buddha replied, "Very well. Go now." I was utterly confused. Go where? Then, I spotted thousands of statues and people inside paintings dancing gracefully, pointing the way to the exit at the same time. They were extremely great dancers indeed. Going left, then right... hurray! I was finally free! With excitement, I danced around, accidentally stepped onto a golden bracelet. It must have been Buddha's present to thank me for fixing his problem.

After I grabbed it, I saw my parents. They must have missed me. I was expecting this sentence from them: "Sonja, where have you been? We're so worried about you!" However, they said this instead: "SONJA! Wake up! Time to visit the amazing Mogao Grottoes!" I woke up, realising I was holding the same golden bracelet which appeared in my dream. Or maybe it was not really a dream...

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Ho, Jacob – 11*

My name's Jack Jacobson. Today my sister, Meg and I went on a tour to the worldwide famous Mogao Grottoes.

During the exhausting long bus trip to the Mogao Grottoes, the tour guide told us some history of the Mogao Grottoes, he particularly warned us not to go to the restricted areas of the heritage site.

We then went into the Mogao Grottoes. I whispered to Meg, "Hey, want to have some fun?" Then, she grinned wickedly and nodded. We then snuck under the barrier and walked deeper into the cave. We saw a giant Buddha. Meg said, "That's creeping me out!" Its eyes were as cold as winter snow. Then something reflected light from its hand.

I climbed up the Buddha, not aware of the danger ahead of us. When I got to its hand, I saw two elegant pendants. Each one of them had a mysterious crystal on it. It kept changing its colour like a rainbow. I tossed one to Meg. She replied, "Wow." I said, "How much do you think it's worth?" she shrugged. We both wore them.

Then, suddenly a ball of light appeared—it sucked us into a black hole. Meg grabbed onto me tightly. In the blink of an eye, everything turned black.

"Are you okay, Jack?" I slowly opened my eyes, Meg let out a sigh of relief, she scolded me, "Thank God! You're alright or I'll be so lonely." "Typical Meg," I thought. Meg and I scanned the horizon. We were in a cave, I saw a statue of a wolf with a gaping mouth. There were two holes in its tongue—perfect shapes for the two pendants that Meg and I were wearing. A large explosion rattled the cave.

We coughed and coughed. In the dust, I slowly opened my eyes and peeked around.

I saw two ruby-red eyes, glittering through the dust. A humanoid creature appeared. It was a 2-meter monster that had razor sharp claws. Fur covered its body. It lunged at me, I dodged in an instant, but even with my lightning reflexes. I had three gigantic scars on my hand. I bellowed, "Meg, run!" Meg grabbed my hand, and we ran together. It was still chasing us. I could literally hear it panting breathlessly behind us—we both had something in common, we were both out of breath. Suddenly a woman's voice echoed, "Keep running!" I wondered who she was, but I trusted her.

Meg and I kept running, we saw light in front of us, as I ran out of the cave, we were surrounded by a tropical forest. I looked behind us—The creature had disappeared; it seemed like it stopped following us. I saw a woman wearing leaves—ye,s leaves. She said to me with a suspiciously dubious voice that sounded an awful lot like the woman I heard when I was running. She asked, "How did you even get in?" I had nothing to say, Meg explained. She frowned, and said, "So... you're from 2022? But it is 1 BC." Meg screamed with delight, "We time travelled!" The woman said, "No no no, this isn't good at all— you'll die if you stay for a week longer." She took us to a... camp.

The camp's people greeted us, after that, they walked away. The woman asked us, "What is your name?" We introduced who we were and she immediately stared at our pendants. She muttered the words, "How, symbol, must, oh no" and more that I couldn't interpret. She then said with a full sentence, "You got the Symbols, I mean the pendants, you must insert those back in... well a wolf statue's tongue, it's located from the cave you just came from. If you don't return them, humanity shall become extinct." Meg and I looked at each other. Probably thinking, "Ahh, it's because of you, now we have to go back from the start and deal with that beast again." But alas, we would've never survived." She saw us argue and interrupted with, "Hey don't worry! You have power with those pendants. OH NO! I can't say anymore about this... magical world, or you will go insane with madness in... your world. Ok now quick! Go back to where you came from."

We had no choice but to return back where we'd been. Meg and I found the cave once again. Without hesitation, we rushed in the cave. We ran towards the opposite direction where we had entered. We scurried through. Then back to the start. I saw the statue. Meg and I ran as fast as we could towards it, but oh well, in a story it never ends this easily.

The beast appeared again. Slashing towards us with its claws. To my surprise, I avoided every single one of its attacks. I countered one of them with my pendant, the crystal had incredible hardness as this time the beast punched with all its might. Meg suddenly kicked it from behind. It screamed in pain, we kept attacking, punch by

punch, then I switched to using the sharp edge of the pendant, which made it easier to defeat it. We punched, slashed and kicked, I never knew I was this good at fighting. I was even stronger than the video game characters. As I did a quick kick at its chest. Meg took the chance and stabbed its head with the crystal, and it slowly stopped moving. We put the pendants back in the tongue.

Meg and I woke up at the restricted area. We quickly caught up with the guide. We were grateful that we were once adventurers navigating through the Mogao Grottoes. We both agreed to keep this adventure as a secret. After all, we do not want anyone to use the pendants as a weapon to destroy humanity. We for whatever reason looked down, and saw the pendants on our neck.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Kwok, Ho Ching – 11*

“Ow!” A piercing scream filled the air.

“What now, Daisy?” I answered groggily. Harsh sunlight streamed into my eyes.

“The mattress is so prickly!” My friend Daisy – a tall girl with long blond hair – called back. With a start, I realized that this wasn’t my bedroom. We were sleeping on hay bales! No wonder Daisy thought it was prickly.

“Err, Daisy?” My voice wavered.

“Yeah what?” She froze. “This isn’t your room!” Daisy yelled.

“Are we kidnapped?” I rolled my eyes.

“If we were kidnapped we would be tied up,” I fought back an urge to add ‘idiot’.

“Anyway, this isn’t my room.” I confirmed.

We were having a sleepover at my place and we had just started to sleep.

“Where are Hazel and Brook?” Daisy asked frantically.

“Meow!” Our cat Brook – a tabby she-cat – narrowed her eyes.

“Help!” We all heard a faint cry for help.

“What’s that?” Daisy inquired. “Hazel!” My eyes widened. We rushed outside and found Hazel – a petite girl with chestnut brown eyes – clinging desperately onto a pale birch tree.

“Help me!” She cried.

“Hang on there!” I shouted.

“Not like I could let go,” She grumbled. “Just get on with it.”

I grabbed a long coil of rope and a sturdy basket big enough for a person, and then tied the rope around the handle. I threw the basket over the branch and told Daisy to hold on to the rope.

“Get into the basket!” I ordered Hazel. Daisy and I released the rope bit by bit and the basket and Hazel finally reached the ground.

“Finally!” Hazel breathed. “I thought I would be up there forever! By the way, where are we?”

“Er...” Daisy and I looked at each other.

“You mean you don’t know?” Hazel demanded. All in a sudden, Brook’s fur bristled and she ran off in a easterly direction.

“BROOK!” Daisy yelled before running after the cat.

A few minutes later, Daisy returned with Brook. She was so pale I thought she’d seen a ghost.

“What happened?” I inquired.

“I have good news and bad news. The good news is that I know where and when we are. The bad news is that...” Daisy’s voice faltered. “That we are a millennia and half ago, ‘near where the Mogao Caves has just been built.’” She quoted the words of a local villager.

“OMG!” Hazel shouted. “Yes! I’ve always wanted to see to beautiful artwork in there when they weren’t destroyed. And I’ve bought my phone!” She said gleefully.

“H–How?” Daisy stuttered.

“I always sleep with my phone in my pocket. In case of emergencies. You never know!” Hazel added matter-of-factly, as she charged right into the Mogao Caves.

“Wow... This place is magical! I can’t wait to see all of it!” Hazel gasped. Each cave was lit by a dim glow, and unique statues and paintings littered them all. Suddenly, the paintings climbed out from their frames and the statues stood up on their pedestals. They crowded around us and stared at us with hostile glares.

“Invaders!” They all hissed.

“I’ve always thought that these statues were powerful, but I’ve never thought them as hostile!” I screamed wildly.

“What do we do now?” Daisy yelled. Brook’s fur was standing up, and she looked like she wanted to pounce on the artwork.

“Stop.” The single commanding word echoed around the room. “These are not invaders.” A female voice filled the room.

“My Lady!” The artwork bowed.

“Who are you?” Daisy asked. A beautiful young woman with eleven heads and a thousand arms who was wearing majestic white robes and a ton of jewelry literally swept into the room.

Hazel breathed, “Are you...”

“Yes, my dear girl, I am Guanyin.” The room filled with the fragrance of lotus and flowers bloomed everywhere at her name being said.

“I teleported you here.”

“Why?” Daisy asked impatiently.

“The time has come. As for who, it’s your cat.”

Guanyin led us into a room with a glowing pearl.

“This is the Pearl of Light.”

Brook leaped onto the pearl and was enclosed in a ball of light. It rose into the air and Brook was transformed into a gorgeous girl.

“Longnu.” Guanyin said with affection. “Did you succeed?”

“Yes, my lady,”

“Where?”

“This one.” She pointed at Daisy.

“We need three.” Guanyin reminded Longnu.

“Oh, then these three.”

“Will someone just explain?” Daisy asked again.

“Put your hands on the pearl.” Guanyin commanded.

We did as we were asked and a new light emerged. A boy leaped out and the light faded.

“Shancai! You are finally reborn!” Longnu cried.

“So *that’s* why your attendants weren’t with you.” Hazel said.

Realization finally hit us –this was all part of a spell to let Shancai be reborn. They bade us goodbye and teleported us back home.

“Well, that was a lot more than weird.” I commented.

“Yeah,” Hazel agreed. “CUTE!” Daisy shrieked. “Kittens!” So, we had a new cat, kittens, and a very excited Daisy.

# Secrets behind the Walls

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Leung, Wai Yan – 11*

## [CHAPTER 1]

There're lots of secrets hidden in Mogao Grottoes... Once you start digging — whether excavating long-populated land for a commercial project or tearing down the walls of a cave — you never know what you'll find.

There may be a ritual object there to ward off evil spirits three hundred years or a few decades ago. It may have been put there on purpose or by accident. Unless there's a note enclosed, you'll never know for sure.

Every place carries history within its walls, ceilings and floors. The very mud, rocks and stones can contain powerful secrets, talismans, some of which were placed there for people from the hereafter to find — a thread linking past and future.

## [CHAPTER 2]

Two months earlier, was a summer vacation for a Korean transfer student who lived in America, named Seon Jae. She decided to go China — Mogao Grottoes with her friends who were Ashton Javernick, Theo Madres and Sylvia Madres, for twenty days in order to do some research from the team project. After booking plane tickets to Mogao Grottoes, they packed up for the trip. After arriving at the airport, they checked-in and got on the plane.

Sixteen hours later, they arrived. "What a long flight!" Ashton yawned.

"Stop being dramatic, Javernick, it's just sixteen hours." Sylvia chuckled. They started a fight afterwards.

"Unnn... Jae already started heading out, we should follow her now..." Theo called out. Aston made a face and left. After walking a while, Jae said, "Let's get on the bus now."

During the bus trip, Aston was fighting with Sylvia while Theo was chatting with Jae. "What's that on your neck? It looks precious."

"Oh! It's moonstone necklace. My mom gave it to me. She told me that this is a family heirloom from my ancestors."

## [CHAPTER 3]

When they reached the Mogao Caves, Jae was the first one entered.

A member of staff approached, "Hello. Welcome to the Mogao Caves. My name is Hao Nam."

"Wait, is... is that a moonstone?" He pointed at Jae's necklace with fear.

"Yes, it is..." She was confused. "You should all come with me..."

He brought them to a room full of ancient arts. After sitting down, Hao Nam introduced a book about stones, "This is the book my master left me before he died. I read the whole book about these stones but I never saw the real ones before." He handed it to Jae.

She read out loud, "Sunstone is a type of feldspar, shimmering with golden shades, for which the stone got its name. Moonstone together with sunstone is a very powerful combination, moonstone activates and enhances energy, and sunstone awakens strength, passion and purposefulness. These stones can control the whole world when both of them meets."

## [CHAPTER 4]

"What?" It gave Ashton goosebumps, all of them were shocked for sure. "The moonstone is in your hands, so you should find the sunstone to prevent villains from stealing." Hao Nam said. He took out a piece of paper and said, "Although I don't know what the whole writing means, my master told me that it's the map to find the sunstone, I think you should take this." Sylvia accepted it.

It was already night; the staff gave them rooms for sleeping. Jae couldn't sleep so she went out with her moonstone holding in her hand. Inside the room, Sylvia realized that Jae was gone and went out to find her. She saw Jae outside on the rooftop looking at the moon. "Isn't it cold outside at night? You should head back to sleep." Sylvia said.

"I can't sleep." Jae replied. She held the stone up high to the sky, a strong blue light appeared when the stone and moon came in line.

Both of them had their eyes wide open. "Sylvia, go wake the others and please take the map out."

"Ugh! What's the problem now! I'm so tired! It's already late in the..." Ashton screamed when he saw the blue light.

Jae snatched the map and tried to use the light to read the words.

“To find the sunstone, go to the highest floor of the Mogao Caves. Use the moonstone’s light to read the words, use the way you did to read this sheet of paper’s words before the sun comes out.” Jae read the words from this sheet of paper. “The rooftop!” Theo shouted.

#### [CHAPTER 5]

Ashton grabbed the stone while yelling, “Give it to me!” The light disappeared in a second. “How come the light doesn’t appear! C’mon!”

Jae took the stone back, and the light appeared again. She put the stone against the walls, and tons of words popped up. “The sunstone is inside the walls on the second floor. To find the stone, use the moonstone to lead you to the way where it’s hidden. To get inside there, throw the stone inside. To take it out, put the stone over there.”

All of them ran down to the second floor, and by the light of the moonstones gave them directions were formed to led them to the stone. The directions lead them to an empty room, the room with a notice of “Do not enter!”

Ashton didn’t care and broke into there, red lasers almost hit Ashton. “Phew! It almost hit my leg!” The others glared at him.

Jae threw the moonstone inside the room, then, all lasers were shut down. Jae picked up the stone and followed the directions to the stone. They saw a hole that fits the stone size like a glove. Jae put the moonstone inside the hole, and suddenly, the wall broke and a box came out. The Madres took the box out and opened it.

#### [CHAPTER 6]

A shimmery golden stone was inside the box. They tried to connect the stones. Until later, both of the stones floated up and gathered together, emitting a strong white light. Suddenly, it stopped floating and quickly fell onto the ground. Hao Nam rushed into the room and saw the stones when Jae was picking up both of them. He gasped, “You have found the sunstone!”

He immediately walked close to the stones. Jae said, “I think, you should take the stones and keep them here.”

All their jaws dropped, “What?”

“Well, it’s dangerous to keep them to myself, these stones should be kept here.” She handed them to Hao Nam. Hao Nam put the stones inside a glass box where other treasures and cultural relics were kept.

#### [CHAPTER 7]

After that day, they continued on with their research about the project. Time flew quickly. Twenty days had already ended, and they went back to America. When they were back, they didn’t tell anyone about the incident as they promised to keep it a secret forever.

However, the gang didn’t know that another challenge was waiting for them and they needed to assemble very soon...

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Liu, Siu Wun – 11*

More than one and a half millennia ago, a monk decided there was something special about a cave, Mogao Grottoes, an oasis he found in the desert on the Silk Road in China.

Over the centuries, thousands of pilgrims arrived and decided to stay, digging more caves and spending their time creating armed art and literature.

Time passed and more than 1000 years later, travellers started taking another route. The Mogao caves in the Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China were forgotten, becoming little more than a dusty legend.

Then, in the 1900s, local and international scholar-explorers, Tom, Susan and Mark rediscovered the caves. They gradually unlocked its breath-taking secrets. There were hundreds of caverns containing some of the world's finest paintings, sculptures and literature — including the oldest, printed book in the world.

They found a very dusty box.

Mark said excitedly, “Let’s open this musty box! We can sell this to the museum!”

However, Susan shook her head, “No! Do not touch it! We should just preserve it. We are scholar-explorers.”

But he did not follow her order. Therefore, he opened it by himself.

“Wow! This looks like an old book. This should be very expensive! We can get a lot of money!” He said.

Tom said angrily, “No! We are scholar-explorers! Like Susan said, we should preserve it! You hear me? Moreover, some said a long long time ago, a monk found a cave that had a book inside and then disappeared! Maybe we should just leave it?”

“It is just a mystery; no one knows if it is real!” Mark said assertively. He couldn’t wait for their discussion, so he opened the book himself...

“Oh no, our torch is off! Everything is black now!” Susan said. When they used another torch, a monk popped up.

“Ah!” They screamed. They were all very shocked and were shaking like a leaf.

Their leader said, “Who... Who are you?”

The monk said, “I am a monk! And who are you guys? What year am I in?”

Then, the monk started to stretch, he said to himself, “Do not be surprised! I came out just now and I have been in that book for one and a half millennia already!”

Shivers went up and down the scholar-explorer's spine, one of them murmured, “Am I dreaming? Why... Why is there a monk?” He then rubbed his eyes and found out this whole situation is real.

He screamed at the top of his lungs, “Ah! Help me! A monk! From...From a book!”

The monk continued and said, “Young people, relax. This is a magical book which I found in this cave called the Mogao Grottoes. Then, it led me to another cave and I was captured by someone who made me stuck in this book! And people said that people who found this magical book are the chosen ones!”

“We...we are scholar-explorers. Now...now we are in 2...2021. I am T...Tom, they are Susan and Ma...Mark.”

Suddenly, the book moved. "Follow it!" The monk said to the scholar-explorers. Although they were a little bit hesitant, they nodded. After a while, the magical book led them to a cave which was dark and looked like a black hole.

The scholar-explorers were shaking like a leaf and weren't sure about going into the cave.

The monk saw them shaking and said, "It is okay, follow me. But! You need to have good preparation."

Now, the scholar-explorers are even more scared. However, they plucked up their courage and followed the monk.

After a while, the monk said, "We arrived.

"The scholar-explorers were very shocked and one of them murmured, "Where...where are we?" Surprisingly, the monk heard that and said, "This is the future of the Silk Road."

"What? This? How come? Why are we in the future?" One of the scholar-explorers asked.

The monk answered, "Oh! That was a magical cave. This cave only allows this book to go in like they have a special relationship. That's why we can travel to this place. I was also surprised and excited at first but when you know the truth, it is very horrible and sad."

"Quick! Show us! How bad?"

"Follow me..." the monk said suspiciously.

After a few hours, the monk said, "Young people, this is the future of the Silk Road."

"Are you kidding me? This is just a land which is filled with grass!" Susan asked.

"Yes, I know. That's why it is horrible. In the future, the Silk Road will be gone." The monk said.

"What? Why?" Tom asked surprisingly.

"Oh, let me explain. We are in 2040 now. Here, the Silk Road is gone because of the speed of sea transportation and the possibility to carry more goods, resulting in the decline of the Silk Road. This shows that people think that the Silk Road has no use anymore. Such a sad situation. The speed of sea transportation, the possibility to carry more goods, and the relative cheapness of transportation resulted in the decline of the Silk Road." The monk said.

"Then, what should we do?" Tom asked nervously.

The monk said, "When you guys get back to the present, promote more about this problem. Even though the Silk Road may have no use, it is part of history and a culture that we should treasure. The Silk Road represents the history of the economy between different countries. This shows that the Silk Road is very important and that we should treasure it."

"Yes, I am sure we can prevent this horrible situation from happening! Right?" The scholar-explorers nodded.

"Now, let us go back to the present. However, I need to go now." The monk said.

"Thank you! We will go back!" The scholar-explorers said.

From this story, we learn that history and culture are important to treasure because culture and history brings to life a past time and place. It is also invaluable for rethinking our own historical moments.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Mei, Kai Cheung – 10*

In a red brick house somewhere, three people were preparing to leave. "Come on!" said one, his name was Weasel, and he wasn't proud of it.

"I know! You think I don't want to go?" another said, she was named Lucy although people liked calling her a "smart aleck", or "superior-pig", or even "Miss-I-know-everything-you-don't". "Plus, you aren't even halfway there!" added "Miss-I-know-everything-you-don't". They did not know that they were going on an adventure for a lifetime.

"STOP THE BICKERING YOU TWO!" Yelled a voice. As you might have guessed, this voice belonged the mother who is very, very strict, and she was not the kind who offers you lollipops every day, in fact, she does not even know what a lollipop is, I bet that is what happens to people who spends 24 hours in sticking their head into the toilet seat searching for ants and cockroaches and who knows what.

Anyways, the three were already driving to their destination.

Finally, after 3 hours of screeching and shouting, ("What IS a LILYPOP?") they pulled in front of an ancient building. "Wow! So is this Mogao Grottoes or just a piece of stone?" gasped Weasel. "It's Mogao Grottoes, dumb." replied Lucy. Secretly, their mother liked the place, but she would not show it because liking something is a sign of weakness and she did not want to show lack of power. Weasel muttered something which was barely audible, except a few words like "I don't know" which launched the "know-it-all" into a full presentation of the Mogao Grottoes, she found it really disappointing that no one was listening, but she was wrong. You are listening! Mogao Grottoes, also known as Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas is formed by 500 temples and 25 kilometer southeast of Dunhuang. It is located in the Gansu province of China. This is the basic information of the Mogao Grottoes.

These three people were in the Mogao Caves now, gasping in amazement at everything. The mother had an "important" phone call so she arranged to meet the children five hours later at the exit.

They walked around and admired the sculptures. Weasel was very happy at that moment until he thought he saw a Buddha sculpture blink. He rubbed his eyes and stared, but the sculpture stayed as still as ever. "C'mon! We will not be able to see all the stuff before the 5 hours are used up!" complained "superior pig". Weasel shrugged and walked on. And then something happened, the lights went out, the sculptures' and paintings' eyes glowed red, and the sky vomited lightning in every direction. Among this all, the combination of darkness and fog seemed to be hiding something terrible, something rotten.

"Lucy? Mom? ANYONE THERE?" Now Weasel was really freaking out. Everybody had disappeared! And now the sculptures were advancing at him, hands out and faces blank, they looked more terrible than ever. Suddenly, a white katana lunged from nowhere and the sculptures screamed, and the next thing he knew, a man was staring at him, apparently curious. The man opened his mouth to speak, but a sculpture popped out of nowhere, and with a swift move, the man kicked it out of the window, into the howling wind and flashing lightning.

"So you are also a creep-seer?" the man asked.

Dazed and surprised, Weasel asked, "A what?"

"A creep-seer, you are."

"H-how do I get out of here?"

"There is a bit of chance you can, but not a single creep-seer will be able to make it back to reality."

Weasel was half scared and half bemused. He had a lot of questions to ask, like what was this place, why did the sculptures go nuts, does it have something to do with the blinking Buddha, why did everyone disappear...

"The only way of getting out is to get struck by lightning." The man said.

Weasel did not like the idea. Still, he needed to go back to reality, to go back to his home, to live, not to die. But what is a creep-seer? "What is a creep-seer?" he asked.

As if he had been expecting Weasel to ask, the man replied automatically, "a creep-seer is someone who enters a 4-dimensional world when they are overjoyed. He or she must be in this part of the cave in order to enter this world.

Before anyone could say a word, Weasel sprinted out of the Mogao Caves, towards the outside. "BOOM!" A lightning struck near him, missed. The man understood what he was doing, and he was trying to say something. But Weasel was too determined to get struck by lightning, and nobody would stop him.

He saw a tree ahead and wanted to go there, but something in his head stopped him, and he immediately knew why, a bolt of blue lightning struck the tree and it dismantled almost in a millisecond. Weasel watched in horror as the remnants of the tree flew into the sky.

The man caught up with Weasel and still panting, he said, "See... see what happens to objects... objects struck by... by blue lightning? You need to get struck by gold lightning!"

Weasel gulped. So it was very hard after all! If only he could know where gold lightning would strike... It was no good, he would be stuck here forever. He walked back to the caves, still shocked. He walked back to where he entered this stupid world. And without thinking, he closed his eyes and willed himself to go back to reality. A few moments later, he opened his eyes and screamed. Lucy the "superior-pig" was glaring at him. "What do you think you were doing? It wasn't funny to hide from me!"

After the adventure in Mogao Grottoes, Weasel learnt an important lesson and it is to never give up even in the worst situation. As the saying goes, "Victory is always possible for the person who refuses to stop fighting."

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Wang, Chin Yu Paris – 9*

It was a sunny Monday, birds were chirping, the sun was shining brightly. Oh, pardon me, I forgot to introduce myself. I am Sirap the explorer who loves to explore history and arts. So, as I was saying, I was at home drinking hot chocolate while watching my favourite television channel, The World History Channel. Just then, the news caster announced that the Mogao Grottoes would be opened to tourists after closing for 5 years! Immediately I checked my calendar to see if I would be free for the next few days, and I would! Excitedly, I called my two best friends right away who were both explorers too! And we decided to visit the Mogao Grottoes together the next day. I was over the moon and quickly packed my stuff and searched more about the Mogao Grottoes before going to bed.

The next day, I woke up at six o'clock in the morning since the first shuttle bus to the Mogao Grottoes was at seven o'clock. I met my friends at the train station and we went to the shuttle bus stop. Luckily, at the last minute we arrived. On the bus, my friends and I shared the research findings we did ourselves and got more and more obsessed with the mystery and beauty of the Mogao Grottoes.

Almost one hour later, we arrived at the Mogao Grottoes. We did not follow the tour guide as we would love to explore by ourselves. In front of us, there was a tall ancient structure. We immediately recognized that building as there were a lot of pictures of this building on the internet. One of my friend named Elly kept taking pictures because she had a travel vlog and she wanted to show everybody the pictures of the Mogao Grottoes. After taking pictures, we went inside the cave. We saw a lot of fine paintings, sculptures and literatures. Just when we were looking at one of the famous painting, I saw some footprints on the wall. I told my friends to take a look and we started to follow the footprints. Just when we arrived at the end of the footprint trail, some walls started to move and trapped us inside, most unbelievably the floor started to shake like earthquake. We were frightened and tried to push the walls but it was no use.

Suddenly, a low voice started to talk, "Welcome to the Mogao Grottoes Gate." "There is a Mogao Grottoes Gate?" I whispered to my friends. In front of us, suddenly a bronze gate appeared. None of us had heard that the Mogao Grottoes had a gate. We continued to listen to the voice. "There is a mystery key in this room, try to find it, you have one hour." Then we immediately started to search, we looked everywhere but it was too dark and too dirty. It seemed impossible to find anything at all. Time flew, when we were about to lose hope, my friend Alice's fingers touched something icy, yes, she found the key. It was stuck on between two walls and it was the same colour of the wall so it was really hard to see it easily. Elly and I hugged Alice in joy and we almost cried in happiness. Then we heard the voice again "Good job! Now you have to unlock the gate with the key and you can find out who I am. Don't be scared, I am not a villain or a bad person." Among us, I was the bravest. So, I inserted the key and you know what, we couldn't believe our eyes. It was the Golden Buddha from the History Book, he was alive and many monks were serving him. We all knelt down and the Golden Buddha told us to stand. He said, "Nice meeting you, I am the Golden Buddha. Now I will ask you a few questions, don't ask me why you need to answer, try your best and you will have the reason in the end, three of you are a team. Ready?" We all said "Ready!" at the same time and he started to ask us questions." First question is about Mathematics. Which number logically follows this series?" Then he waved his left hand, immediately on the wall in front of us, six numbers appeared, they were 4,6,9,6,14 and 6? Elly immediately answered "19". The Golden Buddha nodded, it was correct! Then he said, "Second question, History. Which U.S. president served the shortest time in office till year 2021?" I remember this question was on my exam so I said William Henry Harrison and it was correct too! I could not believe it! Then the Golden Buddha said, "Last question, Science. What is the hottest planet in the Solar System?" This time, Alice said Venus!

The Buddha smiled and said, "Congratulations! Now, let me tell you why am I stuck in this gate." We were all confused and listened to him." Do you all know about the monk that discovered Mogao Grottoes?" We all nodded our head. 'Good, when the monk passed away, his apprentice would continue, but several years ago, there was a bad apprentice and he did not care about digging the Mogao Grottoes, instead, he wanted to steal all the valuables and make a fortune by selling them. At the same time, he played a trick to trapped me inside this gate.' We were all shocked. I asked, "I believe that's true but how can I help you to get out?" The Golden Buddha said any people who can answer these questions would break the spell. To show his appreciation, the Golden Buddha opened another door for us, which led us to the Lost City. "I know you all can be both an explorer and writer, so please tell this story to everybody." All of a sudden, he disappeared. We went through the door and saw a lot of gold and some statues

inside. There were Buddha statues, animal statues and a lot more. We called the police and they put all of the statues in the history museum to let everybody visit and know more about them.

Then, people started living there and named it LC, short for Lost City. Later, both the city and us became famous because of this story.

This adventure inspired us to continue uncovering beauty of the hidden secrets in different countries and cities. As an explorer, I travelled around so stay tuned.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Wong, Tsz Kiu – 10*

More than one and half millennia ago, there was a monk who discovered a cave that was claimed to be the mysterious Mogao Grottoes. That monk decided that there was something special about the cave he discovered – Mogao Grottoes. According to the web, the monk found the cave at an oasis in the desert on the Silk Road in China. Not long after, thousands of pilgrims arrived at the Mogao grottoes and wanted to discover more to claim it to be their land. They stayed day and night, making lots of progress everyday digging and digging more caves, making good use of their time to create sacred art and literature. Lots of arts were made over those centuries, letting people now appreciate and understand more about what people call art those days.

200 years from then, a myth appeared. An American traveler was exploring the cave, when he found a new spot with a rare picture on the wall of the cave. In the picture, there is a circle with a logo in the middle. It seems to be the word ‘M’, but other people think it is a picture of the caves. Most people think it is just scribbles from the cavemen that didn’t mean anything. After lots of thinking, three adventurers decided to go to the cave themselves to get more information about the picture as they were very firm that the so-called logo had an important meaning. When they got to the cave, they couldn’t find the picture anywhere. They were sure that they were at the right spot and everything was exactly same as it was in the photo. It brought huge curiosity to everybody as the picture was completely gone. Two of the adventurers decided to give up but the other insisted to go further in the cave to explore. He didn’t give up on finding the picture so he brought all his research and went further. After he explored further in the deepest part of the cave, the other two adventurers left him behind and returned home themselves as they thought it was too risky. Nobody knows what happened to the remaining adventurer that stayed in the cave and he vanished inside the cave. The two adventurers who already left started to become worried about him and decided to go back to find him. When they got there, they saw the whole cave destroyed and collapsed. They regretted the decision they made earlier but not long after that, they found themselves lost in the forest. They spent almost two months to make their way out of it but sadly, they both passed away not soon after they came out of the forest, and therefore none of their research was passed on and revealed to others. That completed the myth of ‘The Collapsed Logo’ that has been told until nowadays.

There were many myths made by the Mogao Grottoes and ‘The Collapsed Logo’ was only one of them. Another famous myth was called ‘Mammoth Man’. In 1812, there was a family with two children camping near the Mogao Grottoes as they thought it would be a fun experience. When they were camping, the children were messing around with the tree branches and poking each other when they heard a loud grunting noise. None of them had the courage to go near the large bush and see whether if there was somebody else or not. After that noise settled down, the family continued camping as if nothing happened. Then at night, everything was pitch black. The family went to sleep without worrying a bit about the noise they heard in the afternoon. About 2 a.m., they heard the exact same grunting noise they heard in the afternoon. All of a sudden, light flashed out from the bush and the family saw a man with a head of a mammoth behind the bush. It was so frightening for them and they left without packing anything as fast as they could. News of the ‘Mammoth Man’ was spread all around the village after the family came back from the forest. Many people didn’t believe them as obviously, as a combination of a mammoth and a man is not believable.

There are many myths of the Mogao Grottoes that are still told until now. Nobody knows what might happen next to the myths and tales but until now all stories of the Mogao Grottoes are named as myths. The two myths I shared today are only two of the many.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Kowloon Tong School (Primary Section), Yuen, Ho Chit Marcus – 10*

Most of my classmates would feel History is a boring subject. Indeed, I was part of them until that day came into my life. Since then, my classmates have described me as a weirdo because I know the Chinese history tales inside-out especially the one related to the Mogao Grottoes.

Last summer, I went on a trip in China with my family. Dad told me that it would be an adventure to visit the eight caves of Mogao Grottoes as going to have lots of discoveries. He didn't lie to me as it was magnificent and large in scale that I have never seen the scenery before. I wondered how this could be built in the past without the use of technologies.

After buying the entrance tickets, we watched two films in two separate rooms which demonstrated the history and the amazing close-up graphics of the caves. We went on a tour bus to have a deeper look of the caves. There was fully packed with people who were busy taking photos with the signature caves. Definitely the warning of "Photography was prohibited" was not eye-catching enough when comparing with the caves. There was no clear signage as to where to go and there were endless stairs for going up and down. I dashed to the stairs to avoid the crowds and tried to look for something special.

In a flash, all the noise disappeared. I muttered to myself, "Were my ears blocked by the pressure changed?" I shouted, "Mum...? Dad?". I could hear my voice being echoed. When I was about to sob, I heard something tapping the ground and it was getting closer. It was a monk holding a walking stick and walked slowly towards to me. "Kid, are you lost? Let me show you the way how to get out of here.", he spoke to me friendly. I followed his way and discovered there were various paintings and sculpture. Driven by curiosity, I asked him about the paintings, and he brought me to visit the Buddhists' home. When I went to his home, I asked him where my parents were. He replied, "Your parents are not here as you have travelled to the ancient time to the year 907. When I heard it, I saw some mice took me away and brought me into caves and they introduce me some of the paintings. Most of the paintings were about the Buddhist who chopped themselves out to feed the hungry animals as they had to save animals' life first. The mouse told me the paintings were about how the city developed. Then they took me to the first built cave and said, "This cave was found by a monk. On that day he passed this mountain and saw golden light shining like a million Buddhas, so he dug this out."

After that, I followed them downstairs, the tour guide and my parents suddenly appeared. When I looked back and the mice had gone. Without hesitation, I dashed to my parents and hugged them firmly. "Where have you been? We are so worried!" they asked seriously. I replied, "I went upstairs and I lost my way." When the tour guide was about to describe the pictures and their history, I stepped forward and explained every tale to the rest of tourists. They were completely gobsmacked as I acted like an insider. After finishing the tour, Mum kept asking me why I could be so knowledgeable, and I told her that it was the secret between Buddha and me. She laughed out without further questions.

Our Chinese history is amazing as I believe that history is a tale which we all have a part to play. It is as interesting as a detective story and worth to study every clue that our ancestors left it to us to find out. That day has changed my life and passion to history.

# The Mogao Grottoes' Cursed Buddha

*Li Sing Tai Hang School, De Belen, Hailey Angel Enrile De – 12*

And they were finally here: Mogao Grottoes. Elyse had come to write about this wondrous place which has, sadly, been forgotten. Rylie, a friend of Elyse's, accompanied her to the Mogao Grottoes and she let her come since she knew Rylie wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Another friend of theirs, nicknamed "Miki Mouse", drove them to the Dunhuang district where the Mogao Grottoes stood.

Rylie and Elyse got out of the car and waved goodbye to Miki. They stepped into one of the caves. Just thinking about what treasures they'd find made Elyse shiver in excitement, though she knew all they would find would be drawings and different kinds of vases, but she was still excited.

This cave was full of ceramic vases of different sizes and shapes—one vase was stout and teal colored; another vase was tall with a long neck, it had drawings of bulls and hoops; another one was short, blue and purple and had people wearing laurel crowns. It felt like Rylie took hundreds, if not thousands, of pictures. Elyse sketched them for references in the book *Mogao Grottoes and its Wonderful Caves* written and illustrated by the one and only Elyse. Another vase Elyse completely missed was creamy white and blue, it had gold ink writing at the foot of the vase and vicious lions and snakes drawn on it. It was magnificent and deserved to be in her book. She took a closer look at the gold writing and made out the words BEWARE THE CURSED BUDDHA STATUE. A cursed Buddha statue?

"Elyse," Rylie called out, "We should get going. We're burning daylight!"

Elyse turned to her impatient friend, "Soon we'll go. I just need to sketch this last vase." and she continued sketching.

Rylie pouted and turned away from her. She saw a tunnel that led to another cave. She walked to the adjacent cave. It was dimly lit by short and thick candles. Although she couldn't see much, she could still see a gigantic Buddha statue. Huge it was, made out of gold! Now this gigantic golden statue, was *real* treasure. She squealed. She took out her camera and pressed record.

"Look—y here, cam! It's a gigantic golden statue! Made of real gold! Real gold I tell you!" She walked closer to the Buddha statue. "Hey, Buddha statue sir, may I take a picture with you?" The statue remained quiet and still. "Silence means yes." She stopped recording and stood in front of the statue. She made a peace sign with her fingers and took a picture. *Click.* And she continued recording. "I wonder how shocked and happy Elyse would be. Her face would have an enormous smile. That would make me smile too!" She touched the statue. It felt cold. Rylie stopped touching it, and then her eyelids felt heavy. Her hands started to fade. "Huh, is it just me, or am I...disappearing? Ha, what am I...saying?" and with that last sentence, she disappeared and the camera fell with a thud.

Elyse had just finished sketching the last vase and tried to find Rylie who magically disappeared, just as she had said. Elyse searched everywhere but still couldn't find her dear friend. "Rylieeeee!" she cried out, desperate to find her. She heard a loud thud from the cave next to the cave full of vases and went to look. All she saw were paintings on the walls, a huge golden Buddha statue and Rylie's camera on the ground. It was still recording. Elyse stopped the recording and checked the gallery. It showed Rylie recording in front of the statue. Then it showed only the last statue. *"Look—y here cam! It's a gigantic golden—"* Elyse fast-forwarded it, disappointed when it ended. She swiped to the right to see a picture of Rylie posing in front of the Buddha statue, her pearly white teeth gleaming in a smile. She swiped again and another video played. *"I wonder how shocked and happy Elyse would be. Her face would have an enormous smile. That would make me smile too!"* Elyse smiled. Rylie reached out and touched the statue. She stopped touching it and then her eyelids fluttered. It was as if she was fading away. *"Huh, is it just me, or am I disappearing? Ha, what am I...saying..."* and then she disappeared. The camera fell. *Thud.* The camera fell again, from Elyse's grip this time. She was horrified. The golden Buddha statue had made Rylie

disappear! Then she looked at the walls, and saw a painting of a woman, probably 21 years old. She was holding a silver camera. A great big smile on her face. She looked oddly familiar. She looked like...

*Rylie*. Rylie had become a painting! This is what the vase meant! *Beware of the cursed Buddha statue*. If you touched it, it would turn you into a painting. Elyse's breathing turned heavy. Her eyes filled with bitter tears and one by one they fell in the form of teardrops. Everything turned white. The ground...the paintings...the statue...

Elyse woke up sweaty with her heart thumping like elephant stomps. She looked around. She was back at home, not in that ancient cave. Realization hit her: *it was just a dream*.

# The Origin of Mogao Grottoes

*Li Sing Tai Hang School, Singh, Harjas – 11*

In the 1850s, lived a young boy named Mogao Grottoes. He worked hard, dusk till dawn, trying to figure out a special myth he believed in. Villagers told him to stop and start a life.

“You don’t want to end up like your father, do you?” a grandmother declared.

His mother died from starvation in Mogao’s early life. His father, a monk who died, tried to find clues of a hidden cave. Nobody knew what happened to him, what he found, or how he died. It was a Sunday morning when everyone found him gone. Forever.

At that time, people had to share beds with different people of Verakini—their village. Some of his friends searched for him, but they failed. That was when Mogao turned into an orphan. The only reason he survived until now was because of a kind barbarian and his wife—Camilla, who is Mogao’s aunt. Mogao lived in a small cottage with Camilla and Theago—Camilla’s husband. They treated Mogao like their own. Barbarians did not speak Greek, so it was hard for Theago to communicate with Mogao as Mogao spoke Greek.

You might wonder, aren’t Barbarians evil or uncivilized? But no, that was not the case. Theago was kind and helpful. Even if he didn’t have that much money, he would still help Mogao. They had been raising Mogao after the death of his father. Mogao knew that his father wouldn’t just go out to find treasure like a fool. He knew there was a reason. He also knew it was so important that his father sacrificed himself. He wanted to know more but the only thing he could do is to follow his father’s tracks.

Years passed, it was now 1895. Mogao had become a lot older. After tons of research, Mogao had found a lot more than before. He knew the exact location where his father died and what he was trying to find. He found the location when he was searching through his dad’s leftover belongings. His dad kept a notebook and in that notebook there was a sketch of that place. It was unrecognised. It looked like a cave according to his dad’s sketch. And it was located in Dunhuang district of Gansu province in west central China. He knew that because his father wrote that with bold red ink. It was very surprising that the red ink was clearer than the black. The sketch was very hard to see because the notebook was very old and rusty. Moreover, the pitch black ink was not clear. He did not know much about that location because nobody, except for his father has seen it.

But he could use help from a couple of friends he made from the past few years. They were all about the same age as Mogao. They were all explorers, curious about the caves. On 23rd June, 1900 the three of them went on a mission to find the cave and make Verakini proud.

“Let’s go and find the cave!” thundered Sarah—one of Mogao’s friend. They brought their bags they had packed and went going.

“I want to show you something before you go.” said Camilla.

“Okay,” replied Mogao.

Camilla took a little bottle from her closet. Inside the bottle was a bright red carpet. Use this to travel. It will save you a lot of time.

“What is this?” asked Sarah. This is a magic carpet. Everyone was very shocked except for Theago and Camilla.

“It is time to tell them,” Camilla told Theago. “I am a good witch who helps people and Theago is a powerful wizard. That is why I married him.”

All three of them were so shocked that they froze for a minute.

“So why didn’t you tell me earlier, when I was a child?” questioned Mogao.

“I didn’t want you to be alarmed. Now you should use your carpet and get going.” answered Camilla.

“Okay.” the three of them said in unison.

“But how do we control this?” asked Mogao.

“You don’t need to control the carpet, the carpet will control you,” answered Camilla.

They hopped on the carpet and the carpet started to glow and hover.

“Wow! This is so cool!” shouted Sam—the other friend of Mogao.

The carpet flew high in the sky, it was gliding really quickly. When they entered the desert after the endless jungle, the carpet fluttered like a bird without wings.

“What is happening?” shrieked Sarah.

The carpet fell on the blazing sand. After all, riding a magical carpet wasn’t a simple hobby to be picked up and laid down like a card of solitaire. It turned into a beautiful jeep.

“What is going on with this carpet?” Remembering Camilla’s words, “The carpet will control you.” said Mogao.

After two days, the place they arrived at looked like what Mogao’s father had sketched in his notebook.

“I think the cave is that side,” pointed Sam.

“I think you are right,” agreed Mogao.

They took out the tools they had packed and started searching. Sam’s job was to dig; Sarah and Mogao’s jobs were to see if something looked special or strange. After some time, Sam found a dragon shape button as he dug through the sand.

“Come over here!” he shouted in excitement.

Mogao and Sarah rushed to the scene. They all agreed to press it. Once Sam pressed the button, there was a cracking sound in the sand. Something was coming out of the sand. Hundreds of caverns aligned in the middle of the desert. All of them were unique and beautiful.

“This is spectacular!” Mogao said. So all of them went in the first cavern. What they saw shocked them forever. There were endless paintings on the walls, sculptures everywhere and many more priceless artifacts.

“What should we call our discovery?” asked Mogao.

“We should call it Mogao Grottoes,” suggested Sam.

“Yes, after all Mogao was the one who started it all.” agreed Sarah.

# Journey to Dunhuang

*Marymount Primary School, Choi, Ka Ching Veronica – 9*

In my hands was the blurry picture of the Silk Road. Nothing much, but it had the potential to lead me into my distant memories, right to when I was facing the great caverns located in Dunhuang, facing a picturesque towering palace with an astonished expression painted across my face. Let me relate to you my prodigious adventure in the famous Mogao Caves.

Sweat was dripping down my back as I hiked up the cliff leading me to my destination—The Mogao Grottoes. Back then, I was a young explorer sent to explore the legendary Dunhuang Caves. I was exhausted after my trek along the Silk Road, so I stopped to take some photos. I continued after a while and that was when I saw it. The ancient temples stretched out before my eyes, every detail carefully carved out by monks.

Enchanted by it, I inched forward slowly, never taking my eyes off the magical temples storing the historical treasures from our past. I ambled into the empty corridor of the first stopping every once in a while to examine and take pictures of the beautiful paintings on the walls.

When I got to the antechamber, I was amazed by the treasures in it. For example, the sculpture of the great Buddha, the admirable paintings on silk and paper and so on, they were all jaw-droppingly attractive. Now is the year 1900 and these caves have been discovered not long ago, I had the chance to come here without other people interrupting my work. This antechamber was built 1534 years ago in 366AD along with the rest of the temples. Suddenly, something caught my eye, it was a mural on the gigantic wall behind me. The mural showed lots of goddesses and Buddha. Every single inch of it was breathtaking and I was highly impressed with it.

Next, I moved into the main chamber, I was not prepared for what I saw there. Dozens of large and awe-inspiring murals covered the walls, the fresh colours only slightly faded after what was about 15 centuries. I was dumbfounded, treasure after treasure, these ancient paintings, murals, and sculptures never ceased to amaze me. When I saw the statues nearby, I picked one of them up carefully with gloves as to not leave fingerprints.

Out of the blue, the devil in my mind spoke to me, "Steal it! Go ahead and steal the statue!" I asked it, "But that wouldn't be fair to the other people who come to admire the statue, would it? What's the point of stealing it anyways?" It replied that it was valuable and I could steal it for money. I kept trying to refuse but it would not stop making a racket in my head and giving me a headache, so in the end, I gave in. I looked around cautiously and tiptoed to the exit. Accidentally, I slipped and fell, I banged my head against the cold, hard floor of the temple. I saw stars before I completely blacked out. The goddess from the mural I saw just now was in front of me and lecturing me for something. She said, "You shouldn't be so egocentered and gluttonous young fellow! Do you know how many people came here before you? Quite a number, they all left the historical treasures, didn't they? But you didn't, don't you have any guilty conscience? Of all the greediness and selfishness! This is a very precious artifact and everyone around the world should be able to admire and appreciate it if they wanted to! You are stopping them from doing that! I am very disappointed in you. You need to preserve these important artifacts at once, these are irreplaceable! If everyone acted like you, then this world would be robbed of these beautiful paintings and statues! Think about it, then no one, not even you, could admire them! "

Just at that moment, I regained consciousness, embarrassed by my disgust behaviour, I put back the statue at once. As I continued walking along the priceless vases, I realized that the goddess was right. Historical pieces were made to be seen by others too, everyone has the right to look at them and admire them.

That day, I did not make my way back home without gaining anything. I had photos to remember this unforgettable journey, a load of notes, and these Caves of a Thousand Buddhas has taught me one very valuable lesson—Treasures from the past are of great importance and value, we should not take them for personal gain, because that would be preventing other people from enjoying them. We should try our best to treasure them and preserve them because everybody deserves to have a chance to admire them.

# A Captivating Tale

*Marymount Primary School, Choi, Tsz Hei Chloe – 11*

The sunshine warmed the air, and the azure sky showed no difference from the glimmering lake. Packs of tourists led by eager-to-please tour guides could be seen everywhere, snapping photos and chattering avidly, pointing at Mogao Grottoes, which they had been aching to see for quite some time.

Cedric Smith could barely understand its appeal to his parents. What could be so fascinating about a Chinese building with shelves of boring old parchments about art and literature? Weren't all the books and homework given by the school enough? He now understood that humans' greediness could never be satisfied. He swung his leg at a rock, angry for agreeing to this dull trip.

His parents excitedly ushered him inside of the building. 'Oh great,' he thought impatiently. 'Now we're going inside the dump.' Just as he expected, there were dusty paintings and parchments filled with so many words that they seemed to blur together. Some of them were put inside some glass cases, as if they were priceless treasures instead of worthless papers.

They walked from room to room, shuffling between crowds in small, cramped spaces. He was starting to feel somewhat nauseous. He was nudged by waves of people from here to there, back and forth, until he was finally backed to a door labelled 'Staff only' and decided to wait there until his overly-exuberant parents finished their photo-snapping session.

Another wave of people entered the room, and Cedric was close to puking in the stifling room. He took a hasty glance at the door behind him, and he burned with curiosity. 'Anywhere is better than here,' he thought desperately. Cracking open the surprisingly unlocked door, he crept into the pitch-black room.

He took some time adjusting to the dark. The lights weren't on, but Cedric could make out a long corridor. He had a dim sense of foreboding, but the scene outside the room rushed to his memory, and he allowed himself to explore the mysterious place.

Cedric took off his backpack and rummaged in it, then marvelled at his findings. It was a torch, just the thing he needed in the gloom. He switched it on, and blinked a few times to make sure he wasn't hallucinating. There were gargoyles lining up against the walls neatly, and strangely enough, there were buddhist-like figures as well, mixed in with the gargoyles.

Abruptly, a rustling voice echoed through, which made Cedric jump in fright. He shone his torchlight in said direction.

What if it is a staff member? I'm dead; my parents are going to skin me alive. But— What if it isn't? What if it's— a ghost?

He paled dramatically at his own imagination. He felt his legs become jelly-like, and he simply couldn't bring himself to spread his legs and walk. His head slowly turned towards the door helplessly, just to find it was closed, his heart hammering against his ribcage rapidly.

"Hello?" he said hoarsely and anxiously, his throat dry.

"Welcome," boomed a voice overhead, "to the Tales of Mogao Grottoes."

Cedric shuddered. He hoped fervently that someone would barge in and say 'April's Fools!' but this was just his sheer imagination. However, after a few moments which he spent to console himself, he started to feel his muscles relax, and he began to feel the horror that was mounting a few seconds ago sliding away. He had a feeling that all of this was just a joke, and that he had no reason to be afraid. 'It had to be someone playing a trick on me,' he thought, 'How could a voice appear out of nowhere? It's probably just a speaker.'

Then, something changed his mind once again. A glowing book flew to him and steadied itself mid-air in front of him, as if pure magic. He gaped at it, watching it sprint open at its own record. An almighty woman's voice, different from the first, spoke as the book stopped at a page with a single word— 'History'.

"Deep into the Gansu province of China, a long forgotten majestic structure remained hidden, out of sight, up till its recent discovery. For centuries, the province has seen violent wars, the coming and going of natural disasters, and yet the evidence of the Tang Dynasty's presence stood strong with time. This is none other than the world-renowned Mogao Grottoes, which accounts the dream of a Buddhist monk by the name of Le Zun, who envisioned a thousand Buddhas in a golden light."

Cedric was appalled, and he continued staring wide-eyed at the self-narrating book. Another male voice, deep and hollow, sounded as the book flipped to the next page.

"Wherein lies beautiful myths, stories of a gruesome past echo through... loud and sorrowful. Mogao Grottoes have been pillaged in the past, by selfish and egocentric robbers but its stunning history and structure remains to be discovered..."

Cedric listened, his shock disappearing into thin air. He was deeply immersed in the appealing story and thrilling tale of Mogao Grottoes. The book spoke its history, and he seemed to have travelled back in time, to the Tang Dynasty.

After what seemed like an eternity, the book came to an end. "And there it is, strong and powerful. The Mogao Grottoes stand before bewildered eyes, despite its disastrous encounters with the world..."

Cedric blinked. The book was gone. Gone— as if it never existed, as if that never happened. He looked around in vain, trying to find any trace of it. Everything looked far too normal for his taste. Shrugging in utter confusion, he threw open the door, only to discover the security and his parents turning around in the room, desperate to find him.

"Hey, hey, I'm alright," he began, trying to sound casual. He looked around at the arts on the walls, and sudden respect welled up in his heart. Perhaps, it was the aftereffects of what just happened in that room? "Well? What are you waiting for? We have a whole building of Chinese arts to explore!"

# A Magic Test

*Marymount Primary School, Ip, Agnes Nga Chi – 11*

“What’s the next class?” Lily asked. “Ugh, it’s history...” Tom groaned. “Come on now, it isn’t that bad!” Lily pushed Tom to his seat. The bell rang and the teacher, Miss Brown, quickly filed in.

“Welcome class, today we are going to learn about the majestic Mogao Caves. Has anyone heard of it?” Miss Brown asked the class after everyone was seated. “No one? Well, the Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, it forms a system of five hundred temples, twenty-five kilometres southeast of the center of Dunhuang, which is an oasis...Tom, stop drowsing! Are you listening?”

Tom jumped up. “Sorry Miss Brown, I dozed off.” “Well, you better listen now, because there is a test later on, you wouldn’t want to fail it.” Miss Brown scolded him. “As I was saying, Dunhuang is an oasis located at a series of religious and cultural interchanges on the Silk Road, in Gansu province of China. The Mogao Caves are best known to be one of the Chinese Buddhist grottoes, together with the Longmen Grottoes and Yungang Grottoes, are the three famous ancient Buddhist sculptural sites of China.”

Miss Brown kept on babbling different facts about Mogao Caves until she got to the most important part. “Now, I want you to read the fifth chapter of your book, about the Mogao Caves. After that, you’ll be tested.” Miss Brown said, heading to the chair to sit while the whole class groaned in despair.

The whole class read and studied for a few minutes in silence with a sullen mood, with just the faint sound of Tom sleeping. “Ok class, the test is about to start, you will be paired up with a partner.” Miss Brown announced. “Alice with Brian, Daisy and...and lastly, Lily with Tom! Now please take your seats with your partner and we’ll be starting.” She announced cheerfully. “Hey, we’re a team.” Tom walked over to Lily. “Yeah, you better remember everything in the book.” Lily grumbled.

After everyone had taken their seats next to their partner, Miss Brown gave out bingo cards to them. “Each time you answer a question about Mogao Caves, and the answer is correct, I will say a number that is related to the answer, you get to cross out the number if it is in your bingo card, the first group to pop all the numbers wins the game and any group who gets their answers all correct will pass the test. Is everyone clear?” She clarified. “I know you did not read the chapter, so what are we going to do?” Lily slapped herself on the face with the history book while glaring at Tom. “Calm down! I might remember something, so it’ll be fine.” Tom reassured her.

“But you probably won’t—” “The test starts now.” Miss Brown cut off Lily by dingling a small bell. “Do you know this question, Mr?” Lily crossed her arms. “Um...” Tom stuttered, but he felt a sharp prick on his pocket. It was a piece of paper! He opened it and read the words written there.

“What does it say?” Lily questioned. “I don’t know—” Tom responded but was cut off by a sound of wind whirling. They suddenly disappeared, but without any of the other students and the teacher noticing anything.

“Where in the world have you taken us!” Lily yelled at Tom as they landed on their feet at a rocky surface area, slapping his face with the history book. “I don’t know! Maybe you shouldn’t have asked what the paper said!” Tom retorted. They argued for quite a moment before a cold voice appeared behind them. “Would you please excuse me, I’m trying to get through.” “Oh sorry.” Lily apologized pulling Tom to a corner. The man raised his nose up and just simply walked away. “Isn’t that...Lè Zūn? The famous Buddhist monk who in 366 AD, built the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang because he had a vision of a thousand Buddhas bathing in golden light? Let’s follow him!” Lily marveled.

They tip-toed quietly, following behind Lè Zūn. He headed towards a half-built looking cave, he was alone before he was joined by another monk. “That must be the Mogao Caves! Next to him must be the monk Faliang!” Lily whispered. They watched in deep silence as the two monks talked about the cave while the workers worked hard to continuously build it.

The two learned so much about the Mogao Caves. They followed different people around everywhere. They found out things that weren't even written in the history book. For example, the Mogao Caves originally was only a place for monks to meditate. Later on, it was developed to serve the convents that were built up nearby. They learnt about the members of the family of the Northern Wei and Northern Zhou, who constructed many caves near the Mogao Caves, but the best part was seeing everything with their own eyes. Tom finally understood what history was about, it's about how to handle mistakes and be peaceful.

After a while, when they felt they had seen enough, they tried reading the words to go back, and thankfully, they did. It had just been a few minutes in reality, but to them, a long day has passed. They listened intently to Miss Brown's questions until they had got everything. By then, they were the wikipedia of the Mogao Caves.

"We did it! Miss Brown, we finished our card!" They shouted once they finished. "Great job! I have to say, I'm quite impressed with your work. You both have done exceptionally well. I'm glad to say, you have passed the test while winning the game." Miss Brown announced with a happy smile.

"Hooray! We did it!" Lily and Tom cheered. Everyone clapped for them. But the happiest thing of all, was how they understood that Mogao Caves wasn't about meditation, but the importance of learning all about the new and interesting things within it.

# The Great-Elder

*Marymount Primary School, Lee, Wing Ka Alison – 12*

Chinese New Year was approaching, and a red mantle completely covered the city. Children practiced songs; designers sewed clothes; elderlies designed slogans. Family traditions said one must prepare something 'old but worthy'. The precious, most valuable stone, the Great-Elder, illuminates once it confirms one passed the test. The brighter the light, the more successful the test. As the most innovative child ever, I believed it was a piece of cake. Out of the blue, I found myself in a pickle. I struggled to pick the perfect present, which only occurred once in a blue moon.

My parents endeavored to satisfy me with the best and the newest since I was in their arms, although I paid zero effort and no costs. Hence, I felt withdrawn from anything ancient. It was threadbare to me. I even refuse to touch or approach geriatric objects. Such family tradition only applied to twelve-year-olds, so it was the best of both worlds before I triggered the alarm by turning twelve. I'm extending my arms to Death's welcome mat as I must bite the bullet now.

Help descended like a glorified savior. Grandpa moved, and Mom volunteered to empty his apartment. I gave a leg up because treasures were waiting for acknowledgment there. Grandpa desired ancient antiques, indeed, quite old but priceless. I'd complete my task! I thought delightedly, bits of excitement growing like saplings.

Reality crushed my high hopes. Grandpa's apartment, located in the distant rural areas, looked like an abandoned apartment. Breathing sighs of anxiety, I dug restlessly through useless appliances. Even optimistic Mom looked discouraged and woeful.

Though Mom and I were both hesitant, we reluctantly cleared the 'trash pool' in a blink of an eye. Omen brushed me when I was clearing out bookshelves, but it was so mild I merely missed it. A bird flapped out the bookshelf unexpectedly, spreading its wings but couldn't remain in the air. It landed back to the creaky floorboards, which gave its last cry before it gave out. I looked again and discovered the object lying on the floor wasn't a bird but a dusted leather-covered book. I've mistaken its leather cover as feathers; its 'wings' were nothing but yellow, aged pages. Mom was on the balcony, so I began investigating. Once I opened the book, the text began to illuminate. I opened my eyes again and found myself in a completely contrasting atmosphere.

Finding myself located on a long road, I realized I was lost. Wearing old-fashioned Chinese clothes, people hustled and bustled, as busy as a mini-city. Hawkers shouted bargains; fishers carried fish onshore; men moved goods. Even children looked after some stores from thieves and pickpockets.

Feeling a pat on my shoulder, I turned around to see a boy dressed like the others. "Hi, this is Ping. I haven't seen you around before. Lost?" I replied sincerely, "You know where we are?" "Peculiar to question this." Ping looked shocked, and his jaws dropped. "We're in the Silk Road of China!" "Right. What are those pilgrims doing?" The corner of my eye caught a crowd of pilgrims. "Well, they're heading to the Mogao Grottoes. Dunno much about that."

It's a blessing in disguise I got trapped here. I'd find the gift here ——this place looks like a millennia ago. I thought, squealing with fervor. "Great to hear. I was planning to adventure with them anyways. Let's ask to accompany them." We marched to the pilgrims, and they accepted our admission. Soon, we were striding as we walked on eggshells, flashing lanterns in the cave.

It wasn't deep like the fountains of sleep, though it was dark like the seventh ring of Dante's Inferno. Quite frightening too. Adding insult to injury, the pilgrims distributed shovels for digging. I almost refused it, but I imagined everyone exchanging disgusted glances if I rejected. Ditching me in the cave and depart. Unwillingly, I started scouring.

Sweat streamed down my forehead and raced down to my cheeks. I've never felt more exhausted. Under normal circumstances, I would've given up. But I selected to continue. Somebody gasped, I looked and found a gemstone, its glow radiant as the Sun.

A sound boomed piercingly, "You've found the channel to the Haven of the Children. Only those who fulfill our requirements shall enter. You are honest with all your dealings, forsaking treachery or deceitfulness. Your hands are

clean of violence, and your heart is free of envy and selfish ambition. Enter if you fit all these policies. Otherwise, turn and leave."

Anxiety and silence wavered, everyone enthusiastic but apprehended. I felt uneasy too. "It's impossible." I snarled vexedly. Others nodded in agreement. I gritted my teeth nervously until someone uttered something.

"I agree," Ping shouted solemnly, despite him trembling. "Anyone violates at least one of these rules from birth to growth." The gemstone silenced before it articulated again, "Alright. We have discussed this with our villagers, and they all agree. You are all admitted to entering, just because of the villagers."

The gate heaved itself up, unveiling a utopia. Birds chirped cheerily, clouds danced delightedly, and the Sun smiled sincerely. The villagers gathered, celebrating our arrival. "Welcome, guests! We'll host a feast instantly!"

Astonished, I watched how promptly they set the bonfire for a barbecue on a bench. I told them of my sudden appearance and the family tradition. A wise fortune-teller said he was awaiting opportunities to 'rescue' guests. So, he muttered a reminiscence of a poem, and I found myself back in Grandpa's apartment when I opened my eyes again, the book on my lap.

Perhaps the devil isn't as black as I painted! Old things are as precious as new things, and we shouldn't dislike them. Although they might not look as good or work as smoothly, it holds the memories of many and inspires new technology. It also enables us to know more about our culture and history. Without the past, the present would never have existed!

# The Evil Genie's Prank

*Marymount Primary School, Lee, Yan Tung Tiffany – 10*

Thousands of years ago was a place called the Mogao Grottoes where it was as mysterious as haunted houses and as dark as the night sky, with endless tunnels leading from one place to another down the long, dusty paths. Through years of digging, numerous statues, sculptures, and arts were discovered and unearthed, such as the Genie statues which were humongous like blue whales in the deep blue sea.

One dark mysterious night, when everyone was fast asleep and sleeping soundly and peacefully, the full moon was awakened. But as one of the Genie statues was placed outside the caves, the silhouette of the full moon collapsed on it, which in the blink of an eye, came to life. It grew bigger by the minute, until it was three times its original size.

The Genie had a gigantic golden body which shimmered like gold, it could blink, talk and walk around on solid ground with stomping large feet. It even had powers to blasphemy anybody who was in its way. "Nobody could ever stop me now, I can finally take over the world!" the Genie said evilly and sneakily. Everyone woke up so suddenly from the evil Genie's stomping around in the caves. The Genie was trying to curse everyone in its path. As the Genie was starting to get bored and feeling dull, it had the most magnificent and fabulous idea it could ever think of, and that was giving each person three wishes for them to wish for anything they want, but the Genie would make their wishes the opposite of what they wanted. The Genie had a motive, and that was to play tricks on the cavemen and prank them.

The bright sun rose early in the morning, the cavemen started their digging and shovelling again. They were all chatting about what happened the other night that there were extremely tumultuous sounds all over the place. Little did they know, the Genie was planning a big plot to be set on them. All of a sudden, the Genie walked towards the cavemen gently and slowly. The Genie started to say slyly, "Sorry to interrupt your digging and chatting, but I want to say that I made all the loud noises last night and I am truly sorry. I also have one more surprise for each of you, and that is for you to get three wishes to wish for anything you want. Those wishes will appear next week and your lives will be as good as new." The cavemen were so surprised but shocked by the Genie that their mouths were wide open, and their eyes shone like stars. They thought the Genie was familiar because of what they dug up from the caves, but it was their opportunity to have what they have wanted for their lives. Everyone wished for what they wanted and the Genie promised what it said but would do it in the opposite way. Since the Genie had promised everyone that their wishes would appear the next week, it has seven days of time to plan the plot.

As the days passed, the Genie set the plot, and everything became the opposites of what the cavemen had wished and were obviously wrong for the cavemen. Everybody realised that the Genie had pranked all of them and they decided to try to find out what it was that made the Genie turning against them. They knew that the Genie was here on the night the full moon was up, so they thought that it was something about the full moon that made the Genie statue come to life. They believed that it was the full moon that caused the Genie to be nasty and that they have decided that they must keep the Genie away from the next full moon so that it does not become stronger but instead weaker.

Soon the next full moon came, the cavemen were more than ready to destroy the evil Genie. The Genie was sleeping peacefully in its cave, so the cavemen had discreetly placed a massive boulder in front of the cave's entrance to prevent it from leaving. "Ha, ha, ha! Now all the curses the Genie had put on us will vanish into thin air." said one of the cavemen delightedly. But little did they know, the Genie is so strong that it could lift the boulder with one hand.

A second plot was set up against the Genie by the cavemen. First of all, there were puddles of water in front of the cave which the Genie slipped over. The cavemen immediately poured muddy water all over it. In front of the Genie were lots of pebbles and teeny-tiny stones that the Genie tripped over again and again until it fell into the quicksand. Slowly, the Genie sank into the quicksand until it was stuck in it. With force, it tried to pull itself out of the quicksand before standing up fiercely. He roared out a loud roar and jumped and stomped around the ground, making the ground shake violently. "How dare you make me trip and sink like that! You cannot mess with me you humans!" The Genie let out another aggressive yowl and looked towards the full moon to make itself more powerful, but it was too late. The full moon had already set. The Genie cried miserably when it started shrinking and turned back into a small statue at last. Everybody cheered and clasped with excitement, and they celebrated by not digging and shovelling in the caves for one whole day.

# The Quest for Happiness

*Marymount Primary School, Pang, Hay Yin Hayley – 11*

“Good... Not in need...” The voice echoed around the chamber. A dragon sat there, gazing at its crystal ball. The crystal ball showed the dragon every person in the world. It was how the dragon found its next mission. The crystal ball now showed a young girl with a grumpy face, despite the piles of presents around her. The girl was stomping her feet wildly. “My next mission’s going to be tough,” the dragon muttered, and flew out of the room.

“I had twenty presents last birthday. Why do I only have fifteen this year?!” yelled Jing. Jing’s name meant quiet and gentle. However, the real Jing was the exact opposite. She was always throwing a tantrum. She always counted her presents, and if they were less than twenty, she would make you regret it.

Jing, stomping as loud as she could, slammed her bedroom door in the face of her helpless parents, and began throwing anything her hands could reach around the room. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind threw her window open. The gale was so loud, Jing could hear it over her racket. Jing peeked out of her window. To her surprise... and horror, there, just below the window, was a dragon, with gold and bronze scales and a silver tail.

“Mom—” Jing started. But she was silenced immediately. “Don’t talk,” the dragon said with a stern look. Then, somehow, Jing’s voice came out of the dragon’s mouth.

“I want more presents!” the dragon shouted from the room.

“Of course, dear, your dad and I will go to the mall now,” came a panicked voice. Soon, the sound of the front door closing could be heard.

Jing’s mind was filled with questions, but she was too bewildered by everything she had just witnessed to ask them. The dragon flew in from the open window and as though it could read Jing’s mind, it said briskly, “I am the Dragon of Desires, a servant of Guanying. My name is Ming, meaning ‘bright’. I am here to fulfil three of your wishes.”

“Is there a catch?” inquired Jing, finding her voice, “Why pick me of all people?”

“There is no catch. I have picked you because it seemed that you were quite disappointed with everything,” the dragon replied impatiently and without another word, swept Jing, with its long tail, onto its back.

The duo swept into the sky in a zig-zag pattern.

“Hold tight. I have to avoid your nosy neighbours’ gazes,” the dragon said and flew higher.

The view above the clouds was breathtaking. The sky was a clear, light blue, with a little mist draping over it. From high above, Jing could see lush greenery, seas and rivers. After a while, Jing saw a rocky cliff, and carved into it was a red temple. Ming swooped down from the sky and landed before the temple. “This is the Mogao Grottoes. Follow me,” Ming instructed and entered the temple.

Jing obeyed. The inside of the temple was majestic. There were rock-cut architectures of the Buddha, murals of Guanyin, clay sculptures... The statues were life-like. It almost seemed as if the Buddha was right in front of Jing. The art of the temple took Jing’s breath away. She stood there in silence, hoping she could have the entire temple to herself.

Soon, Jing and the dragon entered a room with a colossal buddha statue, which sat cross-legged, with its hands open.

“This temple is spectacular,” muttered Jing.

“I don’t doubt it.” The dragon agreed proudly, “Anyway, time for your three wishes. You can wish for anything...” the dragon said. Then, with a glance at Jing’s face, added “except for the Mogao Grottoes to be yours,” Jing sighed.

Despite that, Jing still had thousands of wishes in mind.

“First, I wish for never-ending fortune. Second, I wish for hundreds of presents,” she said, without any hesitation. “Third, I wish for...” Jing paused. It was her last wish. What should she choose? All the options in her mind were

yelling, “Wish for me! You’ll regret it if you don’t wish for me! Wish for me!” Jing desperately wanted to see which way the cat was going to jump. Then another idea popped into her head—the talent to predict the future. Jing grumbled.

“Having some trouble?” asked Ming. Jing nodded reluctantly. “Well... Let me take you somewhere. Perhaps that may help you,” Ming said, and scooped Jing onto its back.

In no time, the dragon landed before a small cottage. Part of the wooden walls had begun to rot. Ming pushed Jing forward and told her to peek into the window.

There was a family of five in the cottage. The children’s tattered clothes were too small for their size and the parents’ clothes had a few torn patches on them. There were only some pieces of old furniture in the house and their colours were starting to chip off.

Jing frowned. How was this place going to help her know what she wanted? She looked around her. Ming had already fulfilled her first and second wish. Then she glanced back at the cottage. The family was smiling, but why? They had so little, while she, despite everything she had, wasn’t happy. Jing thought having more would give her happiness, but it didn’t. Perhaps she needed to seek happiness in another way...

Suddenly, the myriad wishes in her head vanished, all except one.

She said, “I wish everyone in the world could have everything they need.”

Ming nodded approvingly. He flicked his tail. Jing looked through the window. The furniture inside became newer. The clothes of the family turned smart and new. The family was speechless. But from their faces, Jing could tell that they were overjoyed.

Jing smiled. For the first time, she felt true happiness. After returning to her house, with the dragon’s help, she delivered the presents and fortune she had received from the dragon to everyone around the world, bringing happiness to every single person.

# The Key to Success – A ballet Girl’s Adventure in Dunhuang

*Marymount Primary School, Wu, Hei Tung Helina – 9*

Bella was an ordinary nine years old girl in Hong Kong. She lived with her dad, mum and her five years old little sister. Bella loved dancing ballet. She enjoyed the moment of dancing, and always imagined that she could fly like a flying apsara. However, Bella was timid and always got nervous to dance on the stage because she was afraid of making mistakes. Next week she would attend a ballet audition.

It was Christmas Eve. Bella and her family went to watch the ballet show – Nutcracker. In the show, Clara’s uncle gave Clara a Christmas present of a wooden [nutcracker](#) carved in the shape of a little man. Seeing this scene, Bella felt joyful because she also received a Christmas present from her uncle who had just came back from Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes for vocation and bought her a flying apsara doll!

Bella and her family enjoyed the show very much and had a relaxed night. Recently she had already been preparing for a ballet audition for weeks. However, she still felt nervous and unconfident about the coming audition as she was so keen to be selected in the audition. Bella got tired and sleepy after the ballet show, so she went to bed earlier than usual. In the warm and comfortable bed, she had a magical dream.

In the dream Bella found herself in the forest of beautiful caves in Dunhuang. As if dreaming, Bella met Clara the main character of Nutcracker! Bella told Clara that she was nervous and unconfident about the audition next week. “Maybe the flying apsaras could help her with the problem. Follow me!” Clara said. Surprised, as if lighter than a feather, Clara slowly lifted from the ground and turned into a flying apsara! Oh, it’s not Clara in the Nutcracker, it’s the flying apsara Clara. She led Bella to the places where flying apsaras are practicing and dancing.

“Watching the flying apsaras practice their dance steps must be an unforgettable experience!” Bella thought. “What’s that familiar music and performance? Oh, yes, isn’t that the famous Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands?” The dancers wear a gold and yellow vest and a short skirt with a pair of leggings, and have a golden crown on the head and some sharp finger nails as decoration. They stand in two lines to form a Chinese character “人” (human) and stretch out their long and slim arms one by one, forming a spectacular Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands.

As Bella was watching the practice of Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands, Clara told Bella that the flying apsaras in this troupe were all hearing challenged. However, the timing of the dancers’ moved ran like a clock. Everything, including the music was perfectly synchronized and flowed beautifully. She got stunned, watching their practice again and again and was moved by the flying apsaras’s flawless performance. What the extraordinary commitment, perseverance and courage was needed to overcome unimaginable difficulties and to create such a high caliber art!

The flying apsaras didn’t even had a one minute break, but continued to practice until the dance steps of Lady Buddha with Thousand Hands was perfectly on time. While Bella watched, she felt a hand on her shoulder. Looking back, Bella saw one of the flying apsaras stretching out one hand smilingly as if saying “Would you like to dance with us?”. Of cause, Bella immediately agreed and danced with them. The most amazing thing was that Bella wasn’t scared of dancing in front a lot of audiences and making mistakes anymore.

Rubbing her eyes, Bella was awaked from the dream, she could not find Clara the flying apsara anymore, but only the doll her uncle gave her. Bella looked at the flying apsara doll, and she saw the doll’s mouth moving as if asking her “Now, did you know that confidence and grit is the key to success?”.

# The Heart of Mogao Grottoes

*Marymount Primary School, Zhang, Yanning Jasmine – 10*

So here I am, at the magnificent Mogao Grottoes. The breath-taking building stood in front of me, waiting silently for me to walk in. I breathed in slowly, as if I was trying to take in the beautiful view right in front of my eyes, but I was scared. My mother once said, “Our clan’s bravest explorers once went into the Mogao Grottoes, but none came out.” Taking a deep breath, I drew out my sword and stepped into the silent building.

Eerie echoes bounced off the walls, and every single sound made me shiver with fear. I touched my sword’s blade softly, remembering the voice of my mother. She used to tell us stories about the Mogao Grottoes, and one stood out from all the others. My mother called it ‘The Heart of Mogao Grottoes’. She told us that the 3rd Prince’s remnant belonged in the heart of Mogao Grottoes, and that his remnant’s heart was a treasure that could revive the dead. “Legend has it that after the prince’s sacrifice to the tiger mother,” she read to us, “his parents built him a white building to keep his body. Slowly, people changed the white building into what we know as Mogao Grottoes, his remnant in the painting, waiting to be found.”

I remembered the tragedy that happened when I was seven years old — my mother left me. She left me to suffer, yet she did that to save others by going into that fire. Does she care about other people, but not me? I gripped my sword’s hilt even tighter. “What are you thinking?” I asked myself. “She does care about you! Why did you come here? You came here to revive your mother!” I walked faster and faster. I bumped here and crashed there, climbed in and out of the tunnels blindly, and finally sat down for a rest. I squeezed the amethyst necklace my mother had given me to calm myself down. I groped on the floor and found an old oil lamp. I took a long match from my sack and lit it up in a fiery red flame. I held up the lantern and found myself in a huge, dark room with sculptures and paintings, rusted and faded with age. I glanced up and down in curiosity. ‘How,’ I wondered, ‘How did our ancestors do this?’

I continued to stare at the paintings that laid upon my eyes, “Remember,” I muttered, “You came here to find the Heart. Don’t be distracted!” I grabbed all of my belongings and left the breathtaking cave.

I walked quickly, and somehow, my instinct brought me to another cave. I raised up my lantern, taking in the painting that laid in front of me. My goal. I saw the tigers and royalties and the White Tower. The Heart.

“WHY ARE YOU HERE?” a mysterious voice boomed. “WHO ARE YOU?”

“What is that sound?” I shivered with fear and murmured. My heart started beating like a drum. Remembering ‘honesty is the best policy’, I replied honestly. “I’m Yolanda. I came here to find the Heart.”

“Thank you for answering honestly,” the voice said. “Now, for the Trial.” The painting suddenly became a clear image of a hungry tiger and three cubs. The tiger’s eyes told me everything. It looked so hungry and poor, making me sigh. “Trial One.” the voice said suddenly, making me jump. “Do you want to help the tiger?” The tiger’s soul was so innocent, killing its prey to survive. Taking a deep breath, I replied firmly. “Yes.”

“Answer: Yes.” the voice confirmed. “Trial Two, the Final Trial. How will you help the tiger?” I looked around the newly changed painting. I suddenly heard my mother’s voice ringing in my ears. “The 3rd Prince sacrificed himself to the tiger.” I gasped. This was what happened to the 3rd Prince in the story! I repeated my mother’s words with confidence. “I will sacrifice myself to the tiger.”

“Congratulations, you have passed.” Amazingly, the painting split in half, and an old wooden door appeared. Suddenly, it creaked open, and in front of me was a room, lit up by a dim candle. With slow, quiet steps, I stepped into the small room.

What I noticed first was a beautiful golden chest with a huge stone lock in the centre of the room. Infinite rings of words were written delicately on it. “Aren’t these the ‘scripts’ I read about in storybooks?” I gasped. I pressed onto the lock. Immediately, it started shaking, and with effort, it finally fell off. Automatically, the chest creaked open. Turquoise light shone through the widening gap, forming into—

“The Remnant!” I gasped. A half-transparent turquoise replica of the 3rd Prince appeared. “Why are you here?” He asked. “To— to find the Heart.” I stuttered. “I guessed that,” he smiled warmly. “You aren’t the only one to do so. Many come to find my heart, but they never pass the Trial. Only you did. I set up the Trial so that only someone who

has a truly kind heart can pass.” “What about the Heart?” I asked. “Oh, that’s just a rumour,” he murmured. “Once a person dies, they can’t return. I’m sorry.”

“But— ” I complained. “Listen,” he cut me off. “The rumour is false. Even if it was true, I wouldn’t revive anyone. Death might be the end of one path, but it opens up another one.” He sighed wearily. “Of course, I don’t want you to feel too disappointed. After all, you passed the Trial.”

I perked up immediately. “What is it?”

He tapped my amethyst necklace. “I advanced your gem so that you can see your mother on it.” I stared at my necklace. “Now run, I don’t want anyone to know.”

I nodded. I sprinted through the building, truly smiling for the first time since my mother’s death, feeling the warmth of my mother beside me.

# Two Boys in the Grottoes

*Po Leung Kok Lam Man Chan English Primary School, Lau, Chit Ting Justin –*

On a sunny summer afternoon, Justin went to the Mogao Grottoes with his brother Jim.

Justin was looking at the splendid paintings when Jim called 'Justin come here!' Justin then ran over to Jim.

'What does this say?' Jim asked, pointing to some Chinese writings on the wall.

'If you are reading this, you are lost.' Justin translated. Justin and Jim both turned around, and sure enough, their parents were nowhere to be seen.

'Great!' Jim said to himself. 'There's more!' Justin said. 'It says: A dragon is coming to get you. One touch from his blue fire and you are burnt.' Justin and Jim exchanged worried looks.

'Our chances of survival are slim.' Jim said. 'Thanks for making me even more worried.' Justin sounded frustrated.

Suddenly, Justin froze.

'Uh, Jim, look!' Justin whispered nervously. Then Jim saw it too.

It was a Chinese dragon with shining red scales. It had long curved, bird-like claws which looked like they hadn't been cut a thousand millennia. It had pointy antlers and there were sharp spikes dripping with poison on its back. If anyone tried to attack it from above, he would get impaled.

'I thought Chinese dragons were supposed to be friendly.' Jim whispered. 'I guess that's a common misunderstanding.' Justin said in a weak voice.

'Uh! Oh! I am going to sneeze!' Jim said.

'Can you hold it?'

'No.'

A moment after saying this, Jim let out a big, loud sneeze. The dragon turned around and saw them.

'There you are! Puny little humans.' The dragon said, 'You two are lucky enough to be the feast for the big strong dragon.'

'I don't think you are that big for a dragon.' Jim replied.

The dragon roared angrily. It obviously did not like the comment.

'Run!' Justin shouted.

Justin and Jim both ran, but the dragon followed. They were fairly quick. The dragon, on the other hand, could not move fast because of its big body. It also had trouble squeezing through narrow gaps because its antlers got in the way.

Finally, Justin and Jim reached a dead end.

'The dragon will be here soon. Let's hide!' Jim said. The two of them hid behind a stalagmite.

'What do we do now?' Justin asked. 'I guess we just wait for our doom and pray to the gods.'

They had just finished praying when the dragon came.

‘Come out, humans. There is no hiding from me.’ The dragon said. After a few minutes of searching, the dragon finally found them.

‘There you are!’ The dragon swooped, exposing its sharp talons. Justin and Jim sidestepped. The dragon’s talons were stuck in the rocks.

The two children both noticed that a cave painting was glowing. It depicted people hunting. Jim touched the painting, and his hand went straight through it!

‘It’s a portal! Let go through it before the dragon frees himself.’ Hope ignited in Jim’s heart. He stepped through the portal and Justin followed.

They arrived in an edgeless grassland. Around them was complete chaos. Arrows were flying everywhere. Deer were stampeding while people on horses were chasing after. Justin and Jim were in the middle of a hunt.

One of the hustling hunters saw them and asked, ‘What are you little kids doing here?’ ‘A dragon is looking for us.’ Justin answered. The hunter jaw dropped. ‘Are you serious?’ The other hunter said in disbelief. ‘Yes, we come from a different world. There is not much time to explain. May you help us?’ Jim answered quickly.

‘Give us one reason why we should believe you and help you.’ The hunters said, raising his eyebrows.

‘You...You could sell the dragon scales for a thousand yuan!’ Suddenly, an idea come up in Justin’s mind.

The hunters paused. Then one of them said, ‘Fine! I will help you.’ The other hunters nodded their heads too.

Justin told the hunters to prepare to shoot at the same spot that they appeared on. A few minutes later, there was a flash of light and the dragon appeared.

‘Where are yo-----’ Before it finished the sentence, the dragon turned into a porcupine with arrow quills. It dropped to the ground and lay dead.

Suddenly, out of the sky a person appeared. He was sitting crossed legged on a floating lotus seat. There were small bumps on his black hair, and he wore a small golden crown on his head. His expression gave people a calm and peaceful feeling. When Justin and Jim saw him, their racing hearts finally settled. It was the Buddha.

‘Justin and Jim.’ The Buddha said with a peaceful smile. ‘You have defeated an evil Chinese dragon who betrayed its kind. So, I will grant you a wish.’

Justin and Jim stopped to think for a moment. Then they said, ‘We wish to go back to our parents.’

Buddha smiled and said, ‘Take one of the dragon scales and you will be able to go back home.’ Justin picked up a scale and in a blink of the eye, they stood at the cave entrance. Justin looked at his hand and he saw the dragon scale, he then put it inside his backpack.

‘Mom! Dad!’ Justin and Jim shouted when they ran to their parents. ‘Jim! Justin! We thought we had lost you two! Where have you been?’ Their parents said in a relieving tone.

‘It’s a long story!’ Jim smiled mysteriously.

At night, the two little heroes fell asleep quickly. The scale glowed under the moonlight...

# The Unforgettable Adventure in Cave 254

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Kwok, Long Ching Chloe – 9*

“The Mogao Caves are famous for their mural paintings and Buddhist statues. The precious paintings could be found on the walls and the roofs of the caves.” The tour guide told the tourists. Katie was visiting the famous Mogao Caves with her friend, Daisy. However, Daisy thought it rather boring to listen to the tour guide. Therefore, she decided to convince Katie to slip away and investigate the caves instead.

“Come on Katie, it’s really dull staying here. Let’s go exploring ourselves!” Daisy suggested cunningly. Katie had reservations but nodded with agreement. “I remember the paintings on the south wall of Cave 254 are very terrifying. I love spooky things! How about finding some fun there?” Daisy asked in a curious voice.

“What are they...they about?” Katie stammered as she shivered with fear. She had started to take a bite of one of the hot, juicy hamburgers she’d been keeping for a snack for her and Daisy, but the fear made her wrap it up once more and place it back in her pocket.

“They’re about Prince Sattva and his brothers. Prince Sattva wanted to help a famished tigress that had wandered into the enclosure of the forest. He was so selfless that he killed himself with a sharpened bamboo stick and sacrificed his body. Finally, the tigress crunched Prince Sattva up,” Daisy explained enthusiastically. “Come on, Katie, don’t be a scaredy-cat. Let’s go to Cave 254!” Daisy yelled.

Left with little choice, Katie followed Daisy to Cave 254 timidly.

By the time they reached Cave 254, Daisy turned on her torch. “Look! It’s marvelous here!” she shouted merrily. Her eyes sparkled with delight. There were numerous paintings everywhere.

“ROAR!”

Suddenly, Katie heard a strange sound. She felt panic-stricken. “Daisy! Daisy! Did...did you hear a roaring...roaring sound?” Katie stuttered in a stunned voice.

“No way! Stop telling jokes, Katie! I’m too busy exploring here!” Daisy replied edgily.

“I really want to know where the roaring sound came from, but it won’t put me in danger, will it?” Katie muttered to herself. She then discovered a painting with a tigress and three princes. She walked towards the painting and touched it, both anxiously and curiously at the same time.

All of a sudden, something horrible happened. Her hand vanished! However, there was no time for Katie to rationalise. She turned smaller and smaller and her whole body disappeared in the darkness.

“Why is it so bright here? Where am I?” Katie asked in a puzzled voice. She grimaced in agony because she had hit her head. Katie started to tremble with fear. “No, it is my time to be a hero, not a scaredy-cat,” She suddenly thought. Therefore, Katie decided to explore on her own.

Suddenly, Katie caught a glimpse of movement ahead. She spotted two suspicious figures behind the trees.

“I’m wondering why Sattva asked us to leave first! Maybe he is finding a way to help the tigress.” One of the figures said in a loud voice.

At that moment, realization dawned on Katie. She was inside the painting! Those figures were Prince Sattva’s brothers! “Hey!” Katie chased the prince’s brothers and cried, “Your brother, Prince Sattva is in trouble!”

“Who are you? Anyway, what are you talking about?” The prince’s brothers asked Katie in a rude way.

“Prince Sattva is really in deep trouble!” Katie yelled with all her might.

“This stupid girl is crazy. Look at her silly costume. Let’s go.” One of the princes whispered to his brother.

Katie’s heart sank. “I am a coward. I can’t save Prince Sattva even though I know what will happen to him.” She muttered miserably to herself.

“Ahh, I’ll use the bamboo stick!” A loud voice nearby pierced through the air.

“It must be Prince Sattva! I have to regain my composure if I want to save him! Even though his brothers didn’t trust me, it doesn’t mean I can’t believe in myself!”

Katie grinned and ran towards Prince Sattva. “STOP!” She bellowed and sprang into action. Katie immediately snatched Prince Sattva’s bamboo stick.

“What are you doing? The tigress needs me! She must gobble me down! Don’t you dare stop me?” Prince Sattva hollered with rage.

“Calm down, your highness. You don’t need to sacrifice yourself so that the tigress can eat meat. You have other choices instead,” Katie replied calmly.

“Ok, ok. So, what other choices do I have? Where can I get meat?” Prince Sattva questioned impatiently.

“From me, of course,” Katie answered as she took out the food in her pocket and threw the piece of meat out of her hamburger.

“Roar!” A generous roaring sound suddenly came from the tigress as it enjoyed the gift. The tigress swiftly became more energetic. Then, it walked near Katie and looked as if it wanted more. Katie smiled from ear to ear as she took meat from the second hamburger.

“Wow! You’re amazing!” Prince Sattva exclaimed. He now appreciated Katie so much.

“Thanks!” Katie said and beamed with pride.

“Your act is one of great friendship and compassion!” Prince Sattva said as he held Katie’s hand. He took something out of his pocket. It was a Golden Coin! “It’s for you as thanks for saving my life,” The prince complimented gratefully.

“It’s my honor,” Katie said in a gleeful voice.

“By the way, what is your name? Why are you here? To be frank, you...you look so odd in your outfit.” Prince Sattva asked bewilderedly. By the time Katie wanted to respond, something dreadful happened. Katie closed her eyes as she lost her consciousness once more.

“Katie! Katie! Wake up!” A familiar sound rang. Katie woke up and found herself lying under the painting of Prince Sattva. She wiped her eyes and saw Daisy, who was staring at her worriedly. “Are you ok? Why are you in a sweet slumber here?” Daisy asked.

“I’m ok, Daisy. I’m just a little bit sleepy.” Katie said, feeling a little sad initially, before great pride warmed her spirit.

“Katie, look! There is something weird about the painting. The painting I expected should be a tigress crunching Prince Sattva, but it’s now a tigress munching a piece of meat instead.” exclaimed Daisy. “It looks like the meat of my hamburger!” Daisy said puzzled as she took her hamburger out of Katie’s bag, “Whoa! Where is my meat?”

Katie grinned and touched the Golden coin in her pocket. “I’m not sure,” she told a little white lie, wanting to keep her adventure in the paintings to herself.

“It’s my secret. I hope I can meet Prince Sattva again,” Katie thought joyfully.

# Secrets of the Mogao Caves

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lau, Sum Yau Audrey – 9*

Once upon a time in the Sui dynasty, the people were building caves. The people put a lot of effort into the drawings, which were painted on the wall. They also made a monster out of water, so when anyone disturbs the caves, the monster will scare them away. The Mogao Caves took a long time to build, from the Sui dynasty all the way to the Tang dynasty. After that, everyone just forgot about the caves.

One thousand years later, some kids and their family were taking a stroll in Dunhuang, China. Suddenly, one of the kids saw the cave, he exclaimed, "Look, there is a special cave!" The other kids and the adults came to look at the caves. They wanted to call it the Mogao caves, so they made a sign saying, "This is the Mogao Caves." The family looked inside the caves, and they found a lot of drawings and some statues. The family was very excited and wanted to tell everyone about it.

Suddenly, there was a gigantic monster, it was made from water, and it had teeth as sharp as knives. Everyone shouted, "Help! Help! There is a gigantic monster!" The monster shot out a lot of ice and tried to freeze the kids. There was no one to save them, and things were getting tough, when a kid yelled, "Come on everybody! Wear your roller skates! We will escape faster that way!" They hid in a corner and put on their roller skates, they rolled and rolled for a long time, finally they escaped. The monster was exhausted, and it never left the cave. The monster took the memory of this out of the parents and the kids. The family could not tell the other people about the caves since they had no memory about this, so no one knew about them.

It was the year 2019 when me and my family were on a vacation in China. The shuttle bus took us to Dunhuang. I thought Dunhuang was stunning because of all the plants and trees. At the same time, I heard a loud noise coming from behind me. I walked all the way to the direction of the sound, and I saw a cave! I said, "Look, there is a cave!" I saw a sign saying, "This is the Mogao Caves." Suddenly, a monster appeared. I was terrified since it was as big as a building. The monster shouted, "No one will interrupt this cave!" The monster attacked all the tourists, and it even threw the shuttle bus into the sky. I ran behind a tree and stayed there. The monster said, "I am the powerful monster in this cave, no one can stop me from protecting this cave."

One of the tourists told the monster, "We are not here to disturb you, we are here to look at this place." The monster was outraged, it turned big and small. It was at this moment when a thousand light bulbs switched on in my brother's brain. He drank all the water in his water bottle and exclaimed, "Look monster, there is some treasure in this bottle!" The monster was very interested and looked at the bottle, but he could not see what was inside since the monster was so gigantic. So, the monster turned smaller and smaller until it could go through the tiny hole of the water bottle. My brother closed the cap of the water bottle, and the monster was trapped inside.

Everyone was very happy except for the monster. I gave the bottle to some scientists and my brother got a new water bottle. I told everyone about the mysterious monster, and the next day lots of people went to investigate in these caves. They found lots of old paintings on the walls of the cave; they painted the pictures again because the old ones were wearing off. My brother became very famous because he defeated the monster. Nowadays, anyone could come to the Mogao Caves...unless there was a second monster!

# The Legendary Monk of Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lee, Cheuk Wah Kyra – 10*

Once upon a time, there was a monk called Liu Shi-tang who studied Shaolin martial arts in a mysterious temple in Mogao Grottoes. The temple was owned by and the home of a deceased Shaolin master, who coaches Liu, looks after and does chores for the temple as a ghost. Each morning, Liu would wake up at dawn and run to the temple, warmly greet his coach drinking tea, and train until afternoon. Everything was smooth for years, until one day...

The whole tale started on a winter morning. Liu did his morning routine as usual, excited because his coach had promised to teach him a new style, but when he reached the temple, ready to greet his master, he was shocked. The kung-fu ghost had disappeared! He wasn't in his kitchen-tearoom, not in his library, not in the garden, not on the balcony, not in the training room! He was nowhere to be seen, it seemed as if he had vanished in a puff of smoke. Liu was devastated. How would he learn kung-fu now? How would he search for the martial arts master?

Liu set off on the find, asking the few villagers he met along the way. All of them gave the same answer: No. Nobody saw the ghost, and he did not leave any tracks or clues. It was up to Liu himself to solve the mystery. He climbed a nearby mountain, set camp up there, and peeked and poked between the bushes, down the streams and rivers, and climbed through tunnels for 3 straight days. Everywhere he searched, what he got was just sand, rocks, small plants and insects. When he thought he sensed his master, he realized it was just his imagination. At last he found nothing, except from 2 diamond-jade gemstones, a rusty metal golden bangle, and a brown sun badge with strange characters carved into it. "Probably these will help me," Liu thought as he stuffed them into a leather bag.

He spent a whole day descending the mountain, so stayed the night in an old villager's cottage. The kind-hearted man provided a papyrus with ancient characters that maybe were clues. The next day, Liu thanked and bid the old man goodbye. As he set off on a new adventure, he read the papyrus. Once he set his eyes on it, he immediately recognized the characters! Liu recalled that his coach used these "mysterious" characters to explain kung-fu movements of the body to him! The monk mentally translated the characters. It was a riddle:

*Under the heavy body of the hill,*

*Wonderfully, this place keeps a strong will.*

*Listen as the cave's pool water crash,*

*Try to splash through in a flash.*

*Walk straight into darkness with only a flashlight,*

*And you'll find your target, waiting in the "night".*

As Liu read the first and third line, he got a hint of where he should go. He had to go to a cave under a huge hill, and his first guess was a deep cave near the temple. It was under a hill due east of the temple and Liu had never gone there before.

Soon, he arrived at the opening of the cave. Liu shivered out of fright, since it looked like a huge lion's mouth, ready to munch on anything that wandered inside. Liu took a deep breath, and stepped in. "Alright. I've completed the first 2 lines already. *Listen as the cave's pool water crashes, trying to splash through in a flash.* I should run through here." He dashed quickly through the water pool, then dried his shoes while planning ahead, "*Walk straight into darkness.* OK...? *With only a flashlight.* I've got one! *And you'll find your target, waiting in the night.* My target is Master. He must be here." Liu put on his shoes and switched on the flashlight. He already sensed warmth and safety. He knew the kung-fu coach must be near!

Suddenly, Liu slammed into a wall and got bruised. However, that led him to discover the fact that he had to complete puzzles to enter a chamber where the Shaolin coach was waiting. A bucket and an old, ripped-up paper barely showed a rhyme:

*Ice—cold water, bottom of oil,*

*Light a fire, glittering stones boil.*

*Use the tool for opening a chest,*

*You'll officially start your quest.*

*Diamonds, jade charms,*

*On a sacred wall of alarms.*

*Enter a portal*

*Witness transformations of mortal and immortal.*

*You should remember summer,*

*Where goldens welcome a newcomer.*

“Water is denser than oil; it should be at the bottom. And I should light it with *glittering* stones?” Liu used the bucket to carry some water with oil on top. That moment, in the corner of his eye, he saw bioluminescent pebbles! He picked them up and lit them with the water–oil mixture. Soon, the formula melted into a golden key. The wall slid away and there was another wall covered in buttons except for 2 holes. “The riddle mentions diamonds and jades. Maybe they’re the ones I found on the mountain,” Liu thought as he fixed the gemstones into the holes. Instantly, he fell into a portal and passed out while he changed magically. Returning consciousness, he found himself back in the cave with an orange door in front of him. The orange door had 2 holes, 1 in a sun’s shape, and the other a ring. “Hm... summer. Goldens. The ring is the bangle! The other is for the sun then.” Finally, there was a keyhole on the handle. “That must be the golden key’s. Insert!” The door opened, but he saw nothing. He panicked. “What?! All that for nothing?” Just then, a familiar voice replied, “I was trapped! I’m here. I’m glad you found me, Liu. You have a reward.”

The monk led Master back to the temple and learnt a new style, as promised. The coach revealed that the reward was... Liu was immortal! Liu was overjoyed and swore to help people in need forever.

# New Tales of Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Leung, Hayden – 10*

“Chirp! Chirp!” The crickets were crooning. The night’s aroma pervaded the air. In a cryptic cave in Dunhuang, two courageous explorers, Wong and Chao, were exploring this amazing ancient grotto. They were in the Mogao Caves. The caves were prodigious. There were thousands of humongous Buddhist statues and gorgeous murals inside. The cave exhibition was about to close for the day. But the adventurers just kept on exploring. Suddenly, all the lights flickered off. The whole cave was pitch black. Wong suddenly realized, “This exhibition closes at 6pm and it is already the time to close! How can we get out of this cave with no light?” They used their torches to shine their way out, however they got lost and wandered into the Library Cave.

Inside this cave, there were countless ancient manuscripts, silk banners and paintings. There were fine silk embroideries, and other rare textiles. Chao saw a grubby manuscript, which was hidden in the corner and shimmering mysteriously. She perambulated cautiously to the manuscript. Out of curiosity, she opened it and read it out anxiously. After she finished reading the manuscript, something eccentric immediately happened... All the Buddha statues and murals started to move. They were levitating in the air! Panic surged through Wong and Chao. Their heart lurched. Their stomach clenched. The largest one among the crowds of Buddhas flew out. His left arm was broken. He explained in a soothing yet powerful voice, “We need your help...”

Wong and Chao sweated with fear. They were startled by the fact that the Buddha could move and talk. The Buddha continued, “We came alive because you read the Revitalization Manuscript.” He pointed to Chao, “However, we need to tell you that our Protection Manuscript 236 was stolen. It was originally in the hand of the biggest Buddha in Cave 96. That was the most powerful manuscript. It prevents this place to be destroyed by disastrous earthquakes and other cataclysmic disasters. That is why we could survive for thousands of years. We need your help to find this marvellous manuscript. It must be stolen by the tourists. We can’t leave the Library Cave because this is our home.” Wong stammered, “Okay... We will try our best to find this important manuscript. But... can you tell us where the entrance is? We are lost in this grotto.”

After the buddhas directed the explorers out of the caves. A security guard spotted them. He had a robust figure. Wong caught a glimpse of his name tag. He was called Tao. Tao boomed, “What are you guys doing here? The exhibition is already closed!” Chao uttered, “Manuscript 236 is stolen. We need to find it back.” The guard glanced around and his brows furrowed. He immediately bellowed, “No! There is no such thing as a stolen manuscript! Just go away now or else I will arrest you for trespassing this cave! You are making things up! Don’t waste my time! I need to get back to my security work.” Wong and Chao went home and waited for the next night to come to investigate again.

The next night, two security guards were at the entrance of the Mogao Grottoes, Tao and another guard called Lu. When Lu and Tao were not paying attention, Wong and Chao skulked into the caves surreptitiously. They were as stealthy as ninjas. Once they got inside, they forthwith went to Cave 96 to scrutinize around the largest Buddha and search for clues. For one hour, all they could find was dust and mud only. Suddenly, Wong shouted, “I found a glass shard!” An idea struck Chao, “Let’s go to find the glass pieces that match with this shard!” They went to different rooms to investigate. After examining a few caves, they went to the security guard office. They described a pair of broken glasses on Lu’s table! They thought the criminal must be Lu, however they figured out the glass shard did not match. All of a sudden, they heard some footsteps coming towards their direction. They hid in a large cupboard at once. Unexpectedly, they saw something shimmering inside the cupboard and it was sparkling with rainbow colours. It was the Protection Manuscript 236! They were astonished! In the meantime, Wong and Chao saw Tao stepping into the office through the slits of the cupboard. Tao was holding a broken torch. It seemed that the broken part also matched the glass shard.

Without a second thought, Chao opened the cupboard door and hollered, “You stole Manuscript 236!” Tao dashed away in a flash. Wong and Chao instantly chased after him. Tao darted into the Library Cave. Therefore, Wong intentionally called out, “Buddhas, he stole the protection manuscript!” The Buddhas became alive and flew out straight away. Tao saw the Buddhas turning alive and he fainted right away. When he woke up, he was already in the police car and on the way to the police office.

After the police and Tao left the Library Cave, only Wong and Chao stayed there. The Buddhas came to life again and they beamed ear to ear, “Wong and Chao, thank you so much for finding the most important manuscript.

You saved the magnificent Mogao Grottoes. We all feel relieved now.” In a blink of an eye, the Buddhas turned back into statues. Wong and Chao smiled contentedly. The two courageous explorers continued their journey in the Dunhuang area, hoping to uncover more adventures in the future...

# The New Tale of Diamond Sutra

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Luo, Xin Yue Jane – 10*

It was a cloudless sunny day, Kate and Max were preparing to go to the British Museum in downtown. After traveling for several hours, they finally arrived at their destination. Max and Kate were both very excited because it was their first time visiting the British Museum. The museum was full of numerous ancient art pieces, old rusty fossils, old airplanes, ancient jewelry and many more. Kate's eyes sparkled and she jumped in glee. They went to every corner of the museum. In the corner of her eye, she saw an ancient odd-looking book. She and her brother Max were curious so they went to take a closer look. The book had many ancient symbols on it, there were many patterns and there was a picture of a buddha on it. This book was very different from the others Kate thought. It was so fascinating that it took away Kate's breath.

It was time for them to go home. On the way home all Kate and Max could think about was the ancient book they saw earlier. While Kate and Max were eating lunch, an idea suddenly popped into Max's mind. He told Kate that they should go to the library to do some research about the ancient book. After lunch, they rode their bikes to the public library. They discovered that the book was originally found from a cave in Dunhuang, China. The book was called the Diamond Sutra. Suddenly Kate felt a breath on her shoulder and a shiver ran down her spine. A monk with a golden yellow robe appeared behind them. He asked the kids if they were interested in the Diamond Sutra. "Yes, we are very curious about the Diamond Sutra!" said Kate. "Here, this is a book that you will find answers to your question," said the monk. "Take good care of this book." Then in a blink of an eye, the old monk disappeared in thin air. Kate and Max were shocked, and they thought the monk had magic powers. They stared at the book and realized it was dated 1907.

Afterwards, they went back home and read through the ancient book that the monk gave them. Many hours of reading went by, and they fell asleep exhaustedly. The book suddenly flipped open, a bright beam shot out. It woke up Kate and Max and they walked carefully and slowly toward the book. As they were about to touch the book, it floated in the midair and a deep voice said, "Hello children, I need your help to catch a thief. His name is Marc Aurel Stein. He stole a very important book called Diamond Sutra. To catch the thief, you need to go back in time, to year 1907." Kate thought about it for a long time and she finally agreed to help and so did Max.

The next day, Kate and Max packed their bags and got ready for the adventure ahead of them. When it was twelve o'clock sharp midnight, the book shot a beam of golden light at Max and Kate. It took them to the year 1907 and arrived at Dunhuang, China. Suddenly a deep voice appeared, "Take this map. It will lead you to your destination. Follow the footprints." Suddenly a map came out of nowhere, and footprints appeared on the ground. Kate and Max followed the footprints, and it led them to a wooden cave. There was a monk guarding the cave. The monk said, "If you want to enter, you'll have to answer three riddles." "Sure, I love riddles." Kate said with confidence. The monk declared "First riddle, what can you break, even if you never pick it up or touch it?" "Hmm, I can never break... a promise!" "Correct!" said the monk. "Next riddle, what goes up but never comes down?" "That is easy! Age! You get older, but never get younger." "Correct again, but the last riddle is going to be hard. You see a boat filled with people, yet there isn't a single person on board. How is that possible?" the monk asked. "Hmm, this is harder than the others. There isn't a...single person on board. Is it because everyone on the boat is married?" "Correct again! You got all the riddles right. Now you may enter the cave," the monk said.

The cave was very dark, and luckily the footprints could glow in the dark. It led them to a doorway, and inside was an old library with many books and painting of all sorts. Suddenly a man sprinted through the door. "That's the thief! Catch him, Max!" Kate yelled. Quickly, Max ran toward the man and tackled the thief to the ground. But Max was too weak and the thief quickly escaped from Max's grasp. Kate chased after and threw her backpack like a boomerang. Bang! The backpack hit right on the man's head. He let out a loud scream in pain and went unconscious. Kate quickly picked up the Diamond Sutra and returned the book into the bookshelf where it belonged. Just then, a halo portal appeared.

The portal transported Max and Kate back to their bedroom. "How did we come back home?" Max asked. "I have no idea." Kate gasped. A familiar deep voice appeared, "Well done, my children! You have stopped the thief from stealing Diamond Sutra!" "We did it!" yelled Max! "Shhh, don't wake up Mom and Dad," whispered Kate.

The next day, Kate and Max begged their parents to bring them to the British museum. Thankfully, the parents agreed. When they got there, they rushed to the room where they first saw the ancient book, but there was no sign of it. "Where did it go?" Kate said. "I think we changed history! The book is in the cave library in Dunhuang!" Max exclaimed.

# The Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wang, Zoi Sum Serena – 10*

Zhang Tai scooped up water and splashed it on the clay. Zhang Tai, a monk of the Mogao Grottoes, was part of the duty to create art and statues for the Buddha. Every day, he returned to the Caves to create more and more shrines as a place of worship. Gently, he plastered clumps of clay onto the reed-padded frames. A skilled sculptor, every movement felt all-natural to him, precisely smoothing and cutting the clay with quick cuts of his hand. This was his life. Every day, every moment. If Zhang Tai wasn't resting, he'd be continuing or starting statues. His life was a never-ending loop of modelling, and he enjoyed it. If anything were to happen that would prevent him from the wonders of constructing, he would not know how his life could continue.

He felt his fingers run through the clay, finding dry lumps and crumpling them. Zhang Tai dabbed his finger into the clay, scooping up as much as he could. He loved the feeling of clay. The simplicity of such material, yet creating great statues. His hand felt blessed as he put clay on the padded base of the statue. With ease, he smoothed the clay. He brushed his hands along the statue's clay clothing, creating small creases in the cloth, putting depth into the body. All the glorious visions he had for this one, all the ways it could shine in the eyes of others, though he knew no one would see its greatness.

Nobody seemed to understand Zhang Tai, and he didn't understand how they didn't. The other statues may look good, but he felt no soul in them. The others may have great designs for their statues, but Zhang Tai didn't feel connected with them. It did not feel as if the statue had life, had soul, had existence. A monk should feel in sync with the Buddha, but Zhang Tai did not see the way others saw the Buddha. He believed a Buddha should give hope and a feeling of gratitude, not of how many garments or gems they had. He believed the soul of the Buddha should be more important than the looks it had.

Zhang Tai did not like the face he sculpted. He decided to gently pull off the clay and try again. The face felt too...unreal. He supposed he'd try a different face this time, a face with a gentler smile, one with radiance to it. Scooping up clay and plastering it on, he worked his hands with small movements, making eyes for the statue. While his hands built the face in front of him, he started thinking of his other statues. They faced scorn, and dislike, but that thought simply passed him by. He did not care for the opinions of others, only the way the Buddha truly was.

Zhang Tai remembered his greatest pride, his most beautiful statue of all. The face bore a beautiful shine, and it looked like the Buddha himself. More statues surrounded the Buddha, an artistic wonder to Zhang Tai's eyes. He knew it would go down in greatness. In his brain, all of his successful sculptures shone a yellow light, nature gently curling around it, a strong but gentle radiating glow on the palm of the Buddha. Zhang Tai's thoughts continued to wander as his hands moved on to the highlights and the creases of the face. He thought of new sculptures, perhaps a throne to the wondrous Buddha, and a draping over the hand. It would be a statue worth working on, and he'd continue planning the statue in his head if his hands had not already finished the current face. He shook off his thoughts. The face before him bore quite a lovely smile, and so he moved on from the face, down to the neck.

The statue planned in his head remained. He had almost everything worked out, but he could not figure out the face. A few weeks had passed, and the figure he had been working on was finished from head to toe. It was pretty, and he felt life in its core, so he decided to move on. A sudden pang hit his head. Another headache, perhaps the 3rd or 4th this week. He found it hard to sleep with the bright vision of the planned statue still lingering. This time, though, Zhang Tai fell asleep quickly. In his dream, the statue he had been planning was being built. Then he moved to the face. He could not remember the face. What was it? Panic flooded him. If the face couldn't be made, he'd have to scrap the whole statue. A light dimly lit up the blank face. Zhang Tai saw...

...Faces. Beautiful ones, cycling through the lighted area. Zhang Tai saw a radiating face. It slowed its pace and landed on the blank area above the neck of the statue. Zhang Tai felt as if he saw the Buddha himself. Creating clay out of his bare hands, he worked even quicker than he'd ever seen. He finished at an astounding speed. As it suddenly glowed bright white, Zhang Tai woke from the dream. The face was now placed in his plan, etched in like a scratch to a stone. His eyes burned bright white, and he had no other urge to sleep. Another headache hit him as he

set off early, earlier than the morning birds who chirp, earlier than the sunrise that signed the day. He shook off his thoughts and ran to the next building site, the starlit vision of the Buddha himself, more realistic than ever could have been made by man, running in his head, pacing through his mind.

# One Thousand Golden Statues

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, Chloe – 10*

The wind beat against the strong walls of the cave. The rain dropped heavily without mercy. Lightning flashed, illuminating the sole figure standing alone at the entrance. It was a person. A person with long, tattered robes and a once-beautiful, scarred face. “I cannot wait any longer,” the woman muttered to herself. “My daughter must complete her destiny alone.” Thunder boomed overhead, threatening to rip the sky itself apart. The woman collapsed, unmoving, on the ground, as a forceful voice bellowed its anger to the entire universe.

Jin stared aimlessly at the falling sun. So beautiful on the horizon. It glimmered with the beauty of a million gems, a million cups of warmth, a million grams of gold. “Your name means gold,” her mother used to sit next to her and say, “But not only on the outside its beauty would show. Glow from the inside, Jin. Always remember that.” But now everything has changed, since the horrifying accident that took her mother’s life. She looked far, far out to sea, and saw a great cave, big enough to swallow mountains and all her troubles away. What was it? She stared at it every single passing day. Gradually she found out what she could see – the Mogao Grottoes.

One silent night, Jin crept out of the house. It’s not like her father cared anyway, so what was the point? She asked herself. She ran out with a backpack of supplies and ran for so long her legs didn’t know where she was going anymore. And finally, she stopped in front of a modern cottage house. It was her best friend Claudia’s house. She was not native to China, with her large, shiny brown eyes, skin as white as snow, and braided, brunette hair. She came out of the house grumbling in her pajamas before Jin even pressed the doorbell. “Your running is louder than a truck. Be thankful I woke up instead of my parents.” Jin groaned and grabbed her hand. “Comb your messy hair. We’re going.” Saying that she took off into a run across the moor, dragging a stumbling Claudia. “Where to? Wait. You always say...” A look of realization flashed across her face. “Jin, are you serious? The Mogao Grottoes?” Jin nodded her head with determination. Claudia would never desert her even if they went to hell and back. “And we’re going to take Yang with us,” she added. Soon they found an apartment near the center of the city. Yang reacted the same as Claudia had and determinedly joined them. “I would do anything for you, especially when you need it,” was his reply to them. They all understood Jin and knew what to do.

Dawn was breaking when they finally hailed a taxi. The sky turned different shades of colors, giving a little hope to the three teenagers in the packed cab. Jin smiled at the large cave that glimmered next to the rising sun. She was to complete a prophecy that no one had ever succeeded in, with the help and care of her two best friends. Her mind floated back to the year she first came across an ancient prophecy book. She would never forget the five simple sentences.

“The girl with the golden heart

Shall come forth and depart

With her friends, and save

The treasure to uncover in the cave

The girl with the golden name”

“Hey, Jin?” Yang snapped his fingers. “Lighten up! It’s not the end of the world...” He smiled brightly. Jin allowed herself a small smile. At least if she had to be on a supposedly impossible quest, at least her friends were with her. “So we are supposed to do an impossible quest with no start. What should we do? Stand inside the cave all day?” Jin groaned. They hesitantly squirmed into the cave. Its breathtaking beauty slapped the trio off their feet. Standing inside the cave were approximately 400 large stone Buddha statues. But Jin looked at her feet. “There used to be 1000, all destroyed now,” she said silently.

After half a day of searching for any clue, Claudia suddenly screamed. “Jin! Yang! I found something!” Jin squinted. There was a tiny, tiny black dot on the ground. She realized it was a button. Claudia smiled and bent down to press it. “Claudia! No!” Jin tried to warn her, but the damage was done. A swirling vortex sucked the air out of the trio’s lungs– and themselves, too.

Jin landed hard on the ground. She tried to stand but suppressed a scream. Yang landed lightly on his feet and rushed over. "Broken ribs," he stated to Jin. She groaned. But all this time Claudia had been silent. Jin looked over and saw her mouth was agape, staring with shock at something. Something enormous. Yang and Jin looked over. It was a giant Buddha statue. It moved. It twitched. It smiled evilly. "So, little trespassers, what are your last words?" it boomed.

The next few minutes were chaos. The statue lunged at Jin when Claudia ran between its legs and stabbed it in between with a chunk of jagged rock. It howled in agony as the three of them raced at it. But wait, Jin thought. What use are three inexperienced teenagers against a 40 feet tall magical statue? Yang shouted out loud, "Claudia! Jin! The trapdoor behind it!" Jin understood. She dragged herself, ignoring the sharp pain, under its legs once more and pushed the door open. She ran as she had never run before to her friends, and together they raced to the room. Claudia slammed herself onto the gates and they closed with a creak, leaving the giant to pound angrily at the metal doors. All three of them panted and heaved, Jin wincing at her ribs.

In front of them stood a thousand gold statues.

# The Thwarted Plan

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, Kei Yu Kate – 10*

“This is so boring! Can we leave?” Leon moaned. “Can you just be quiet for a moment, Leon? I’m trying to examine this beautiful mural!” His sister, Emma snapped back. Leon was at the Mogao Grottoes in China with his family. Emma and Leon’s friends, Mandy and Justin, were also with them. They had gone to China in order to have a peaceful and relaxing, or in Leon’s words, BORING vacation. Leon hated history. “History is just a whole load of useless rubbish we need to learn about! What’s the point of all this?” He often complained. Then the others would say, “We learn about history in order to understand about the modern-day world, please stop complaining Leon!” Now, back to what is happening in the story.

They were standing in front of a Buddhist mural in one of the caves in the Mogao Grottoes. Leon was moaning on and on about how boring it was while the others were checking out the detailed mural on the cave wall. That was when Leon noticed something that wasn’t quite right. They were supposed to be following the tour guide, yet there was a person creeping away from the group. Leon prodded on Emma’s arm. “What?” She asked. “Look guys, somebody is acting suspicious,” The four friends wheeled around. Sure enough, they saw a man creeping off silently. “That is suspicious. The tour guide told everybody to stick with the group at the beginning of the tour! He should know that it is easy to get lost,” Mandy whispered. “Should we follow him? We could be like spies,” Justin suggested. “Are you crazy Justin? We’ll get lost!” Emma whispered. “Sis, I have a bad feeling about that man. I think that Justin is right. We should go after him,” Leon said. “I think that we should go too. If you aren’t going, then we are,” Mandy said. “Fine, but I’m only going because I don’t want to be left alone here,” Emma sighed. Silently, they slipped away from the group and towards the man.

Silently, they followed the man. They went through a lot of winding corridors, until the man reached a wall. He knocked on the wall three times with his left hand. The wall became a door, which opened for the man. “Well, how did it go, Jim?” A voice floated through the open door. The man spoke, “All we have to do is to put the gunpowder in cave 275, and we’re set to light those powder kegs.” The man inside the room chuckled. The four friends looked at each other, stunned. These people were trying to blow up the Mogao Grottoes! Very soon, they were going to light the gunpowder and blow everything up! Then Justin did something that was very stupid. He ran right through the doorway and yelled, “Stop this! Don’t blow up the Mogao Grottoes!” He yelled at the men. The men reacted instinctively. There was crash. The others, horrified, crept closer to have a look. It appeared that the men had knocked Justin out. “I have a feeling that there’s somebody outside who’s with this little kid,” One of the men grunted. He dashed out of the door and saw the others crouching there. Then he gave a roar of fury and launched himself at them. They all screamed and ran. The two men chased them down the winding corridor. They turned left, then right. The kids went through a doorway to the left. That was when something happened. The doorway melted away and became a wall, they were stunned. It was as if the Mogao Grottoes were helping them. They all collapsed on the floor, panting for breath. When they all got their breath back, Mandy said, “I think that we should leave a message for Justin. When he comes around, he can call for help.” That was when a phone suddenly appeared on the floor. The Mogao Grottoes were really helping them! They scribbled a note to Justin and dropped it onto the floor. It read:

If you get this note, then the Mogao Grottoes are helping you. Take the phone on the floor and call the police. We are being chased by the men. Help!

From your friends

After that, they ran out of the room as fast as they could, just in case the men were on their tail. The sprinted along winding corridors and up some stairs. They had no idea in which direction they were going, all they cared about was getting away from the men. After running for what felt like eternity, they stopped to catch their breath. That was when they spotted two pairs of feet standing in front of them. Somehow, they had run straight into the men. For a split second, they looked up at the evil smirks spreading on their faces. Then they sprinted off in the opposite direction. Suddenly, they found their path blocked by a hooded figure. They were trapped.

Meanwhile...

Justin had found the note. He snatched the phone and dialed 999. Five minutes later the police arrived. Everybody started searching for the others and the men. They searched through caves. At last, when they opened a door...

They found Mandy, Leon and Emma tied up and gagged shoved against a wall, and the two men standing over them, sneering. The police pointed their guns at the men and they held their hands up, afraid. Justin ran over to his friends and untied them. Mandy asked, “Have you seen a hooded figure? That’s the boss of the men! He blocked us when we were trying to run! When he heard footsteps coming towards this room, he panicked and disappeared. Oh, and he left this note.” They looked at it:

You may have defeated me this time, but there will a next time kids!

The Master

They turned pale and whispered, “The Master?” That was when they realized that their new adventure had only just begun.

# A Trip to the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Hayden – 11*

Kelsie and Ryan were very excited because they were going to Mogao Grottoes tomorrow. They had been preparing for a whole month for this trip to these legendary caves. Kelsie and Ryan really liked reading. When reading wasn't enough, they would usually go on field trips to learn more about things that they were interested in. They had been fascinated by the Mogao Grottoes and were longing to go there. Unfortunately, the entrance fee was incredibly expensive. Last month, they read in a magazine that the Mogao Grottoes had an ideal discount, so they bought two tickets for themselves and planned for the whole month to visit there. This trip will surely be unforgettable for them.

The next day, Kelsie and Ryan woke up early and ran to the grottoes fast as there was a quota of going into the Grottoes. At nine o'clock sharp, everybody rushed in like a stampede of buffaloes. Thanks to the large amount of information beforehand, the siblings were totally captivated by what they saw. As they were watching these magnificent buildings, Ryan felt a strong pull towards one of the grottoes from his heart. "I really want to go there. Something is pulling me." He told Kelsie. Kelsie saw a pair of eyes staring cautiously at her and her brother among the crowd. "It's just my imagination," thought Kelsie.

The siblings went to their destination – "Cave 275." Kelsie said as she read the visitors' guide, "At the west side of the Grottoes, it is one of the oldest caves found and was built more than 1500 years ago. The main and the largest statue was called Maitreya. It was 3.4 metres tall." She looked at the statue. There was a glowing sign on its hand. "Look!" shouted Kelsie. Ryan saw it too, "It's glowing!" Ryan saw a thin, long leg, sticking out behind the enormous statue. "Who are you? Show yourself!" He shouted, shuddering. "It's only me." a man walked slowly out of the shade behind the statue. He continued, "Good Morning, chosen ones! I'm Walter, the Guardian of Mogao." "Chosen for what?" Kelsie spat out impulsively. Walter answered, "Of course, to get into the scroll room of Mogao."

"Why? How?" Kelsie asked. Walter replied, "For 2000 years, the Buddhists have ruled China peacefully, building some mythical platforms and temples. Have you ever wondered why Mogao could stand for so long that it was hardly broken? Because there was magic in it. The Mogao contains scrolls about history. Very rarely, someone will be chosen to read the scrolls and be informed of the history of China. The chosen ones can visit and take a look if they pass through the Room."

When Kelsie and Ryan were puzzling, the legs of the statue rose up, and there was a dark, dusty hole in the rock where the statue was sitting on. "Wow!" Ryan gulped. They carefully climbed into the hole.

After traveling through the narrow tunnel, the siblings dropped into a chamber. Inside, it was like an escaping room. There were sculptures of mighty dragons, silver warrior crafts, and lots of decorations in the room. At the end of the room, there was a camouflaged door. Kelsie tried to open it, but it was locked. "Looks like we need to solve this question to open the door." She said, thinking. In the middle of the room, there was a rectangular, golden table, with twelve figures of animals, who were in positions of dashing, running towards the same side. At the end of the table, there was a flag and a line. "Looks like this is the finishing line." Ryan cried, slapping his legs, "I knew it! We need to line the models in the correct order to make that stupid door open!" "Yes! These were the twelve animals of the year! My teacher told me all about them. Mouse is the first and Pig is the last." Kelsie replied, stretching her hands quickly to reorder them. "Nice job, sis. Good for you that you concentrated in class." Ryan patted Kelsie's shoulders. Suddenly, a loud voice rumbled, and the ground shook. "Beat you, door!" Kelsie laughed proudly, dashing through the opened door to another room.

The siblings entered the scroll room, which was smaller than they thought. The room was very hollow. It only had an old, sacred wardrobe, with many kinds of scrolls. There was a piece of paper, which said "Wise to read one. Foolish to read two. The greedy ones will be expelled into darkness forever..." "It's spooky. Let's take a look at a scroll." Kelsie randomly picked up a scroll and read it. Ryan stuck his head in and tried to take a look of what was in the book. "Let me see." he hissed. After scanning the content, Ryan was completely overjoyed that he slapped Kelsie on her back, "It's the accurate history of 3000 years ago! Are you kidding me?"

Two hours passed, and they finally finished reading. Kelsie was delighted, but... "What a story! Wait! How can we get out of here?" She just realized that the door was now slammed shut. Ryan answered, "Check if there's any

button. It might be the button for the way out.” “Here!” Kelsie pressed the button. The place that Ryan and Kelsie stepped on rose up immediately and whoosh! They were back in cave 275.

“Had a nice trip?” Walter boomed out. “It is surely a nice trip.” The siblings agreed, sharing their experience with the guardian. Afterall, the siblings had just woken up from a ‘dream walk’. They promised to publish their incredible story and announce this wonderful legend to the world.

# The Mystery of the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Ronnie – 11*

It was a windy typhoon day during the middle of the dry humid summer, Tyson and Elizabeth were at their own different houses.

“I wish we could go out and have fun, not staying in our own rusty, boring house.” Elizabeth whined on the phone.

“I hope so. The typhoon is just insane. It's been here for the whole week already! We can only stay at our stupid little room phoning each other. I wish we could meet each other face to face.” Tyson complained also.

Next day, they were told that the typhoon had finally gone. They both immediately met up at the small little park where they spent their sweet and lovely time together for years. They both cuddled each other as soon as e they met. After decades, they finally separated. The little couple was making plans for the coming vacation.

“How about going on a vacation in China?” Elizabeth suggested, “maybe to the Moga0 Grottoes?”

Tyson looked up in the sky, thought for a moment, and replied, “Sure! Why not?”

Suddenly a strong magnetic force pulled the couple towards a blue swirling wormhole. The two tried to pull them from the blue magnetic force. However, it was as hard as calling the sun to rise from the west and making the moon show up in the morning. They were pulled into the blue bright portal. They grabbed each other's hands, yelling for help. They knew it was useless. The light of hope started to melt down. They closed their eyes and waited for their fate.

After swirling and reversing inside the wormhole, they realized that they were on a hard land. They slowly opened their eyes, trying to find out where they were. What they saw was a whole crowd of tourists walking around. The tourists were all taking out their phones, taking selfies or portraits. “At least we are not in the ancient time or something like the BACK TO THE FUTURE...” Tyson EXCLAIMED.

“Yeah, at least...” Elizabeth agreed.

Tyson took out his phone and searched for his location. Surprisingly, he found out that he was in the Southeast of the Dunhuang oasis, where the Mogao Grottoes was located. He told his girlfriend excitedly, “Oh my gosh! We are having excellent luck! The portal brought us to the Mogao Grottoes! We're having a free vacation!”

The couple was delighted. They immediately charged to the marvelous cave that had stood there for 1685 years. The historical place that kept the evidence of evolution in Buddhist art. They skipped happily to the extraordinary cave. Before they started to have a look at the marvelous cave, they found a mysterious map on the floor. They had no idea what it was, but they still held on to it.

They slowly walked up the long staircase that connected to different caves. They first went to the painting cave. It was amazing. The picture showed the evolution of Buddhism. They were astonished. Suddenly a bunch of light shot out from their map. They didn't know what was happening, so they took the map out. To their surprise, the blank map somehow became a piece of English script. They read the script word by word. It said, “The paintings on the wall had recorded the full journey of how Xuanzang went to India to bring Buddhism to China. Every harsh moment and pain were told in this mural.”

The couple was astounded by the mural in front of them. They walked from place to place and together, then they were in cave 302, the best evidence of Chinese history. Once again, the map shone brightly. The words on it had changed to something else. This time it said, “This is cave 302. It was built in the Sui Dynasty. It contains one of the oldest and most vivid scenes of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road, depicting a camel pulling a cart, which was the typical trade of that period.”

The two exclaimed how valuable the Mogao Grottoes was. They held an important historical evidence during the development of China.

The night was coming fast. They only had little precious time left to go over this historical cave. They went to the library cave, the place where millions of historical strips and literature pieces were kept. Again, the words in the magical map had changed. A detailed description of the treasure in this spectacular cave was shown in the map. “This is the Library Cave. It was first discovered in 1990. This little cave contains tens of thousands of historical Chinese scripts. All experts acclaim that this cave is the greatest discovery of oriental ancient culture. Not only that, it is an invaluable reference for the study of ancient China and Central Asia.”

The two had a good look at the scripts displayed on the brownish wooden rack. After that, night fell. They were thinking how they could get back to their houses.

A familiar magnetic pull appeared again. It was the blue swirling portal! They both hopped happily to the blue lightning portal. This time, they had no fear at all. They were relaxed. After some swirling and rotating, they arrived back at their village. The magical map was still in their grasp, but there were no longer any signs of words. They both knew that this historical China trip would be the most extraordinary trip that they had ever had.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chan, Yan Tung Yannie – 9*

Our story starts here, thousands of years ago, when the ancient Silk Road was still in use. There was a dim-witted and always curious seller by the name of Yukami walking along the path of the Silk Road. At the end of the road, near a poxy little village, there stood a large cavern, awaiting unaware people to fall in. As Yukami, holding his goods, clambered down the rocky and sandy road, his eyes met something strange. A cavern? Although he was near his destination, he was very, very curious and decided to climb down with his goods. Then, as he was carefully clambering down, his slippery hands gave way and he fell. “Argh!” he cried out as he dropped. To this day, he has never been seen.

Meanwhile, in our later part of the story, six children from the year 2022 were playing with the Ouija Board, the world's #1 most haunted game, which was said to be “controlled by a spirit of each board.” Their names were Racle, Mirac, Sophia, Andy, Hugo, and Serena. Well, of course, they had to give it a try! I'll say it worked since they got sucked inside the board instead. They screamed and screamed as they held each other's hands! And, with a mighty crash, they landed in the same cavern where Yukami was huddled in greasy, dirty blankets. “Wh—who are you?” Sophia stuttered, afraid.

This man looked like he hadn't eaten for centuries!

Yukami whimpered sadly, “You're trapped in the cavern I've explored more than a millennia ago...” He told them quickly to find a way out or they would have the same fate as him. So, frightened, the children combed the cavern for an exit (except for Hugo, because he decided if the man could stay here for thousands of years, he would live forever) and couldn't find one. They had no choice but to split out, so the children got separated from Yukami. Unsurprisingly, after who-knows-when, Yukami got lost! They decided to go around to search for him because who knows what might have happened? Soon, each person found themselves stuck in a cave with a task assigned for them. But all they had to do was simply to avoid it. After they had reunited, the protector of the cavern had shown up out of the blue and punished them for entering the cavern without permission. He wanted to start a battle. So, he struck the first blow. It was terrible! With yelling and disagreeing from everyone, it was chaos. “Hey! What's this?” A struggling Sophia heard Racle yell. She was holding a pale diamond. It shone in the light of the crystals like the moon! Immediately, Sophia got up and started searching. Soon, Andy joined in, trying hard to break free of the curse first. Serena, the child with the biggest brains, watched them as she thought and fought at the same time. Andy soon found a ball of fire that followed him around like a dragon stick to food. Therefore, he called it Flame of the Dragon. Meanwhile, Sophia had gone to a dustier area of the cavern and started to dig. She dug some. And dug some more. Soon she saw a glint of gold in the sand and tenderly scooped up the soft golden sand. It smelt like honey. Sophia loved it!

Just then, Serena called out, “Guys! We can use those to defeat the protector! We need four though... I'll go find the last one since Hugo, Yukami, and Mirac are a bit tired...” After that, she sped off.

She soon came back with an old rubber wheel and a ghastly sparkling grey rock that emitted a smoky spirit that would help you.

"Seriously, Serena? A rubber car wheel?" Andy rolled his eyes.

Serena replied defiantly, "No! I was talking to a weird smoky spirit. He said he was trapped inside this rock and knew everything here. He brought me the tire and told me how to combine the elements and how he never got the chance to get himself out with those," she paused, "put the sand and the diamond in the center of the wheel. Andy, get a stick and prod the fire so you get it inside. After I put the rock, Sophia shall say the magic words." She whispered to Sophia while pointing at the old rubber wheel.

Sophia nodded and slowly announced, “Of earth, fire, rock and sparkle, summon a power that would help us leave.....Now!”

The old rubber tyre seemed to understand, and started to glow and vibrate. Suddenly, a beam of light shot through the cavern ceiling from the tyre. The elements were gone. Mirac, Hugo, Yukami, and the protector were shocked!

Racle exclaimed, "A pogo stick? What do we do with this!?"

Hugo then grabbed the pogo stick, bounced twice, and suddenly leapt from his pogo stick on the protector's head! As the protector was old and frail, he burst apart and shattered immediately, leaving behind a thunderous roar and a large beam of light. The power released from him was so strong, it sent the shocked children and Yukami flying back to their home in America. They were free!

"We're safe!" Yukami yelled out in joy. Although he was tired and hungry, he had not aged a single bit. Mirac had a wonderful idea. "Hey, why don't you live with us?" She said happily. He nodded with tears in his eyes. Soon, the children and Yukami simply burned the Ouija board that brought them to the spooky cavern in their barbecue pit. Little did they know, it began to evolve again.....

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chau, Kong Tsun Andy – 9*

Thousands and thousands of years in the future, there are some explorers who want to experience the lives from the past. They stole the time machine from the lab and charged it with a high EMP(electromagnetic pulse) contained power cell. After the procedure, they went to the time portal.

When they jumped off the time machine, Kaya processed the chance of getting out, 0.00000000000001%.

Everyone thought for a while, Henry said, “We should team up!” The others agreed.

What Kaya actually was calculating, was the chance we got out without breaking the laws of time and space. Kaya found out the core was missing in the tower long ago.

They set up a plan to steal the core; Ken first used invisibility to get rid of the guards in front of the gate. Then Henry teleported us in. Yannie stole the core and they got out of here.

They peeked at the gate of the tower. There were guards standing straight in front of the gate, probably guarding the gate. Ken gave Yannie invisibility, and Yannie defeated the guards. When they opened the mask, they saw a body that was biologically without a head. Even if they were from the future, they still had never seen that before. With some scary vibes going on in their heart, they still stepped through the gate...

They kept going up, still no sign of the core, the stairs felt like it was endless.

Kaya asked, “If we can't go up, can we go down?”

They went downwards. Without a blink of an eye, they were already in the basement. For safety measures, they let Yannie take it. Yannie took it with ease. Suddenly, a bunch of running sounds and there came the guards. They held hands and disappeared in front of their eyes. This is Henry’s ability: to teleport anything but not through time and space. They made it back. Yannie put the core and recharged it. A shine of light came through the portal. It was the light which “told” them to go back. They went in the portal before the guards couldn’t even realise they already “left”.

They came back. Their mom, Jess, asked her four children, “Did you all finish borrowing the books for your project?”

They replied, “Yes...of course!”

They saw mom with an angry face. They knew two things: first, they bet mom knew everything. Second, they were going to detention!

After the one-week-detention, they realised history is not what it seems. They were just lucky to flip a tiny part of the leaf without dying. Never challenge history!

# The Mogao Caves

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Cheung, Sheung Kiu Mirac – 9*

A long long time ago, there was a huge mystery in the Mogao Caves. A dark and spooky cave with a secret chamber.

Sophie and Julie were friends. Sophie was not very smart but she was very caring. She liked to help people. She was keen at ending arguments because of her great warm heart. Almost everybody wanted to be her friend. Julie had good grades; she always wanted to be the smartest. She often started an argument, but still, her bestie Sophie liked her a lot.

One day, Sophie and Julie had a sleepover. They saw a very old box in Sophie's bedroom and they opened it. Magically, they got sucked into the box.

They had teleported to Mogao Caves. They were in Western Thousand Buddha Caves. There were thousands of Buddhist arts. There was a myth saying that there were thousands of Buddhas behind the painting. Then, unawares, the walls collapsed. They quickly ran for shelter. Unfortunately, the pictures were all broken.

Surprisingly, there were buddhas who helped them out. They came out from the creation. The legend is true! The buddhas managed the way out and they sent them home by a flying book from the library caves. The Mogao Cave would be fixed very soon.

The two girls reached home safely, thanks to the Buddha's and the flying book. They promised that they would keep it a secret. They would not tell anymore even their friends!

# The Mogao Caves

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Cheung, Sum Kiu Racle – 9*

A long long time ago, there were two princesses who were twins living in a house on their own. The Mogao Caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha Grottoes or Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, Dunhuang, the Silk Road, in Gansu province, China.

The twins were called Crystiana and Anna. Crystiana was very smart and clever and she is also a fast thinker and a problem solver. She was attractive and popular at college. Sometimes she had evil thoughts. She loved winter. Anna was not good at academic; she didn't always get good grades. However, she loved and cared for everyone. She was also lovely and loved summer.

One day, Anna and Crystiana each found a mysterious box on the floor. When they touched the box, they teleported to the Mogao Caves. Suddenly, a gigantic stone fell from nowhere and blocked the entrance. Soon, they found out that one of the stones represented ice and the other represented fire.

Unexpectedly, a monster moved the big stone and came into the cave and said to Crystiana and Anna, "You two need to give me the two stones, or else I will kill you."

They were so frightened, so they gave him the two stones even though they didn't want to. The monster used powerful magic to open the two stones. In each stone, there was a gemstone, yes, but it was extremely glamorous.

At last, the monster finally let them out of the cave and teleported them back to their own home.

# Tales from the Mogao

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Chu, Long Yin – 10*

A hundred years ago, there was a family who lived in an old wooden hut near the Mogao Caves. They lived a peaceful life with food and clothes, it was all they needed. But they never knew what was inside the Mogao Caves, and never went in.

One day, the family's lovely, kind daughter Morginni asked his parents, "Mom, dad, what is inside Mogao Caves? I want to know, may be there will be treasure inside!"

Once hearing the word "treasure", Morginni's brother Gabeleth's eyes light up with glee,

"Did you say treasure? Let's go now!"

They left the house and a cold breeze blew past them. They stared at the humongous entrance of the Mogao Cave, mouth opened — wide, and they stepped inside...

They looked around in surprise, the cave walls were filled with colourful paintings of animals, peoples and ancient civilisations. They wandered through the maze—like passageways and not long later, they were lost,

"Where are we?" cried Gabeleth.

They began to panic and Morginni started to sob helplessly. Alistar looked around and saw a strange sign on a wall,

"Hey! Look at this!"

They rushed towards the strange sign, which resembles strange arrows with numbers on it

.

"Left, right, left, left, right, what does it mean?"

Morginni exclaimed with glee,

"I get it, it must be the order of directions we need to go to get out of this labyrinth!"

They memorised the order and got out of the maze in no time. They then entered a large empty room,

"Wait, that's all, nothing, easy!", shouted Gabeleth.

"Careful, son. It could be a booby trap." replied his mother Silestar,

but Gabeleth had already rushed in. All of a sudden, a giant stalactite fell from the rocky ceiling and crashed in front of Gabeleth, he screamed like a baby and rushed back to his mother. They inched forward carefully step by step, so that they would not shake the room. Soon, they made it to the other side,

"Whew," sighed Silestar, "That was close!"

They then entered a small room with a table in front of them and statues of animals around them. There was a monkey, cat, dog and rabbit. There were even pieces of rocks that looked like bananas, fish, meat and carrots.

"This puzzle is easy, we just need to match the animals with the food they eat!"

shouted the Alastar. They immediately got to work, and soon a doorway to the treasure room appeared. They walked in and discovered an old painting. It was the painting of their family tree. They were really excited to have found this unique painting, and will treasure it forever.

# Tales From the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Ho, Sui Chit – 10*

A long long time ago, two travellers Luke and Dave who were twins and both looked tired, were walking along the Silk Road in a desert, hoping to find a place to stay and rest because they haven't stopped walking for days, and still are finding a bed to lie on. The weather was above 40 degrees celsius, which was super hot and there was not even a drip of water in the desert, so they were having a hard trip...

Later, after a long walk, they found something green and blue in the desert, it included trees and a giant pool of water. It was an oasis in the desert. Finally, they had found a place to recharge. They lied on the water and swam around. Luke and Dave, two had a wonderful time until they found something, it was a cave just beside the oasis. Luke and Dave moved into the cave. Luke said "we can finally relax"

After they moved into the cave, Luke lied down and said

"Now we can relax in this cave and the oasis is just beside us so we can get water any moment!"

Dave nodded his head. Suddenly, they heard a strange noise, there was someone else in the cave! Dave said,

"He..hello?"

Then came a voice,

"I am Jake, I have been living here for years." He was very short, with a moustache above his mouth, a wise old man. His voice was very low. "Hi!" Luke said,

"Why did you just come out?" Jake replied,

"I am going to find food, stay here and wait." And Jake walked out of the cave and went off to find food.

After a few days of waiting, Jake never seemed to come back, Luke and Dave got worried.

"Where is Jake? I am starving with just water to drink," said Dave.

The trees were starting to die, and there was not much water left, and the twins were very tired. Then Dave marched out of the cave and started to find Jake. Not long after he walked away, he came back with a familiar body, it's Jake! He must have died of hunger and dehydration!

After Jake's death, Luke and Dave found out that Jake actually died of falling off a cliff accidentally! Luke and Dave were heartbroken, so to remember him, they carved many statues and literature.

Years passed, people who arrived at the Mogao Caves remembered the lasting culture and continued it, until now, the Mogao caves were discovered by modern humans.

# Mogao Cave

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Kiang, Cheuk Yau – 10*

In China, there are millions of caves. Although the best and the most mysterious one is the Mogao Cave. It was built a long time ago and was filled with gigantic and beautiful sculptures. Although no one really knows the reason how the cave was built without modern technology and why the talented person ever built it. But today, clear your brains, because I am going to tell you the story behind it...

1000 years ago in a bone dry desert, the boiling hot sun rays were shining on the sand, making it look like glitter. It all seemed to be very silent when some shuffling sounds echoed through the desert. A man was walking through. His bare feet sinking in the burning sand, beads of sweat rolling down his face, he was Roy the explorer, he came to explore the dry and empty desert, hoping to let his precious son and wife know more about it. He stopped in mid way, bent down and scooped a handful of sand as he muttered to himself with a pleasant smile, "They would like it." He was about to continue his journey when he noticed that he couldn't move his legs, his body was slowly sinking down in the sand, his hands wobbling as he almost did a backflip when his body toppled to the back. Just then he realized he just stepped right into a quicksand! He tried his best having his balance as he frantically flapped his arms like a bird, shouting for help. It was like all hope was lost, now his waist was touching the sand, and soon after a minute, all you could hear was some muffled voice in the sand and a desperate, waving hand stinking up.

Suddenly, a transparent cloud slowly whirled around in the air. The cloud pieced itself together into a body shape, then the head, and the nose and eyes. Then, it floated down next to Roy, with one wave with its fluffy transparent hand, a magical force pulled Roy out of the quicksand. Roy's clothes were now a bit ragged, with bits of holes in random spots, he flinched in pain and let out a tiny squeak, he managed to get a glimpse of the cloudy savior but it disappeared in a flash. Roy fell to the soft, slightly sizzling ground, he rubbed his back as he stared longingly at the fluffy white clouds floating in the sky, still very amazed and confused about what happened. He paced back and forth around the sand, brushing his feet, thinking aloud, "Who is that clouded figure, how did something so soft pull me up so easily? Is it a person or what? Am I in a dream?" Millions of questions flooded into his brain as he questioned himself over and over again.

Soon, it was sunset. The sky was ablaze with the fire of the setting sun. The weather was getting colder and colder, Roy stopped questioning himself and started looking around for shelter. His teeth chattering like a horse, clamping his hands around his arms, shivering. His eyes darted around and to his relief, found a cave. Roy bolted to the cave in delight. The cave was rocky and colossal, some rocks crumbling down from the ceiling. But Roy didn't mind, because he got shelter after all.

He gathered up some wood, rocks and strings to make a bonfire when he realized the food he brought were all dried up. He rummaged through his backpack, but the best he could find was a dried up fish which turned to a disgusting shade of brown. Roy moaned and threw the fish behind him with huge disappointment. Just then, something popped up in his brain. "The cloudy savior! I was so confused I forgot to thank it!" Roy said, slapping his forehead. He looked around him, some wood, stone and string..... It would be perfect for making an axe! Plus he got a whole large cave to himself. Roy twirled around in excitement as he yelled, "Idea! I will make a museum with this cave and axe!" Roy knew who to sculpt since he was little, a great interest of him, really.

Roy picked up the string and started tying the wood and the largest piece of stone he could find together. Soon enough, Roy started chopping, concentrating hard on what the cloudy god looked like. Since he can't really remember what it looked like, he started sculpting what he believes. He built the god sitting on an elegant throne, with tiny servants dancing around it. Roy didn't know he was going too far. Soon enough, the whole cave was built and filled with tall and large sculptures. Roy was pretty proud of himself. Lucky him found the most amazing thing anyone has ever seen too, a lake full of water and berries! Roy used the berries as paint and made the cave look enchanting. Although a few more days later after he finished sculpting his thanks, he was running out of water and berries! He looked back at the beautiful cave and gave a small smirk, he had secretly hidden a treasure in it. A very valuable one. He got it from his backpack. He never leaves a journey without it to keep him in company. But he knew that someone who worships the god and his art needs it more than him. It's pretty simple. To be the "someone", it's pretty simple. You just need to discover more about the cave! Soon, you'll know...

# The Most Recently Discovered Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lam, Sung Chit – 10*

In 1988, a family with different talents was traveling to near countries in a desert, and they discovered a deep, dark cave. They went inside because they were very tired. The family consists of Galahad (father), Martha (mother), Astaroth (eldest sibling, brother), Morrigan (sister), and Artemis (youngest sibling, sister). After they went into the cave, there was a giant rumble and suddenly, a giant rock blocked the exit. “Oh no!” said Galahad, “we can’t go back out!”

Martha said, “Well, the only thing we can do now is to explore and see what’s inside. Maybe we can even find another exit!”

Eventually, they all agreed.

Into the cave, they came across a maze made of plants. They went into the maze and turned left, then right, then in the middle, then left and hit a dead end. Morrigan cried, “What do we do now?” Artemis said, “We can backtrack and try again!” Soon, they backtracked and tried again. And, they saw the exit of the maze!

Next was a room full of humongous bricks. One of them read “push here for a test (and pick up the capes, one for each)” so they picked up the capes and pushed the button. Suddenly, the floor gave away and they were falling through the air. Morrigan shouted, “AAHH! I HATE THIS! Wait, Morrigan, calm down, and think of an idea. I know! We can use our capes as parachutes!” They did that and landed safely on the bottom. “Phew! What a blow!” Said Morrigan, “all that made me want to do a number one.” She said, as they continued on their journey.

Lastly, they came stumbling across a small dog with a sign that says “to exit, please tame the dog”. Astaroth was the best at fighting, so he went to fight the dog to tame it. He kicked, punched, and did some advanced moves. But the dog seemed to be made out of steel, because nothing worked on it. After an hour of fighting, Morrigan said, squirming, “I... I... really have to go. Can you hurry up?” Astaroth replied “I am trying my best!” All of a sudden, he realised that he only needed to pet the dog to tame it. So he petted the dog, and the dog wagged his tail and panted. “I guess you found yourself a dog,” said Martha to Astaroth. “Thanks, mom, you’re the best!” Said Astaroth.

Suddenly, a part of the brick wall opened, and they saw a passageway with dim light. They ran excitedly. Then, after a long walk, they finally found the exit.

After they exited, they found an oasis with fresh water and fruit. They all took enough food for the rest of the journey, and Morrigan was about to go when suddenly, a black thing sucked them in.

A few seconds later, they were teleported into another cave that was blocked (probably the end of the cave). The only thing that was shining was Galahad and Martha’s phones. The lights they turned on from their phones were dim (so Morrigan hid in the corner to pull up her dress but when Astaroth turned on his flashlight, they could look a lot better. The room was full of riddles, and the one in front of them read, “what thing can be really hard,

But allows you to pass, no matter what?

What thing is sideways,

But you can understand from the start?”

All of them looked confused. They asked, “What do you think, Morrigan?” Morrigan, being the brightest lightbulb in the family, read it again, shivering from holding her number one, said “A riddle!” Then, the riddle disappeared. Galahad said, “good job, Morrigan! It probably means that you have answered correctly!” Morrigan broke into a big smile.

Then, after all the riddles, the wall separated into two halves and there was a sign. It showed “who can be the best gymnast?” Challenge. “I’m going to win!” Said Martha, since she is the most flexible. “First challenge: the 180 degrees leg stretch.” Morrigan said, “I quit! I can’t hold my urine like that!” As Martha easily did it. Artemis succeeded too, and so did Astaroth, but roughly.

“Next round: handstand” read the banner. Martha did it as a professional, but Astaroth and Artemis failed. “Yes! I won! What do I get?” She asked. The banner now read: “You get a mansion in the destination you are heading to

and all the drinks in the world including water.” Then, the wall acted like an automatic door again, and finally, they saw a male restroom and there was a sign with the female restroom, as well as the exit pointing to a narrow corridor. And there, they saw... Mogao Grottoes! Morrigan said, “Finally! I almost leaked!” But when she tried to go, there was a bright light surrounding them and they were teleported in front of a mansion.

A few years went by and their journey was a memorable past. The day they turned the cave to the scholars helped them earn a lot of money. All was well.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lam, Yat Yi – 10*

It is 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1907. There was a curious researcher called David. David was as short as a monkey, so it was easy for him to get inside narrow gaps and small doors. David had brown hair, and had rather pale skin. David loved researching and exploring hidden places in China. Right now, he was going to travel to Mogao Caves and look for ancient things for his ancient China cultural research.

David stepped inside the first cave he saw. Inside the cave, it was dusty and dry. He touched the walls, which were smooth, and it was carved. David looked for ancient writings, sculptures, books, anything that would help with his research on Mogao Caves. As he walked deeper and deeper into the cave, he still didn't find anything. "Hmmm," He thought, "I should be seeing some art now." He still couldn't find anything, but David decided not to give up, and walked deeper into the cave.

David looked around for some clues. He looked at the walls and the floor to look for anything that would lead him to the ancient scrolls and sculptures. He searched around, and eventually found some markings on the floor. He tried to figure out what it meant, but it made no sense to him. "What does any of these markings mean?" He said to himself. David couldn't figure it out, so he tried looking for other clues, but he couldn't find any more.

David started to wander around as there were no clues to help him. He thought, "Maybe if I walk around, I might find something!" So he started to walk around the enormous cave.

As he walked, he suddenly came to two paths, one leading to the right, and one to the left. "Which one should I choose?" He wondered. He decided that he would head to the right path. After a few minutes, he came back to the two paths. "Hey, that's strange! I was just here! It's like I'm walking in circles!" So this time, David went to the left path. He had been walking around for 10 minutes, and he had no idea where he was. "I think I'm lost," David said.

David got desperate. He needed to get out of the caves, even if it meant he wouldn't get anything for his research. David was running around in the caves in panic trying to find the exit. As he was going around the caves, he stumbled across a big square with lots of tiles on it. Each of the tiles had animals like tigers, sharks, alligators, and mice on them. Not caring about the tiles, David stepped on one of the tiles with a tiger on it. As soon as he set foot on the tile, an arrow shot out of the wall and almost hit him. "AH!" he shouted. "That was close," he thought, his heart beating, "why was there an arrow shooting out of there anyway?" He looked at the tiles carefully. He saw a rock on the ground, so he picked it up and put it on a shark tile. The shark tile fell down, along with some other tiles around it, revealing a lava pool underneath. The other tiles returned to the surface, except for the shark tile, which was burning in the lava. "Hmmm. Tigers, sharks, alligators, and mice. What do they all have in common?" He asked himself. "Of course! They are all dangerous except the mice!" He said aloud. He threw a rock on the mouse tile, and nothing happened. "Yes!" He thought he jumped on all the mouse tiles and safely got across. At the other side was what he was looking for.

The scrolls, the sculptures, the books, the writings, the art! Everything he was looking for! David was overjoyed! "HOORAY! I found what I needed!" He wrote down everything in his notebook, and took some pictures. "Wait, I'm still lost." He wasn't so happy anymore. But then his happiness returned after he found the back exit! He rushed out and called his assistant to fly a helicopter to get back to his lab.

At last, David's research was complete, and it was a success! David even shared his research with people around the world, and he became one of the most famous explorers. David found out a lot of hidden secrets and places and China, and he was determined to find it all.

# The Great Escape in the Mogao Grotto

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Lau, Katie – 11*

“Freeze! You can’t escape from this prison!” A prison guard shouted. The person who escaped from the prison was a man called Miles. He was innocent, but everyone in the village thought that he stole the precious painting, the soul of their village (they claimed) since he was the last person to go into the room and after that, their painting was gone. He was sent to the prison in the village and had no other choice but to escape from that horrifying place.

He escaped from the prison successfully, but he didn’t lose the guards. The guards were following him like his shadow. He didn’t have a chance to sit down and relax. Miles almost ran out of breath after this long running “competition”. He stopped and had a break, but he forgot that the guards were still after him. They were about to get Miles. Miles saw a cave right in front of him. He quietly sneaked into the cave. “Phew, they almost found me!” Miles thought he was very lucky, but he didn’t know that he was even luckier to be in this cave— the Mogao Grotto, which was admired worldwide.

It didn’t take too long for the guards to find out that he was in the cave. They caught the sight of him once again. Miles ran towards a door without noticing what was behind that door. He just knew that he had to run. When he ran into the doorway, he found that there was a picture of a goddess on the wall next to him. She was wearing a beautiful red dress. She sat on a glorious golden throne, praying.

Miles stopped his legs in front of this cave painting. Miles loved art since he was small, and he had studied art for a long time. He loved this picture. He felt like he was inside this picture when he was enjoying it. But time flew swiftly. The guards were catching up again. He had no choice but to run forward while his eyes were sticking to the paintings of gods and goddesses he saw.

“I hate this stupid Mogao Grotto. It’s like a maze. I wonder when we will catch him and report to the boss!” One of the grumpy guards said. Miles then realized he was in the famous Mogao Grotto that he had always wanted to visit.

Miles found a little corner where he could hide from the guards. He sneaked in. “Let’s just break these walls so we can get him easily,” a guard suggested. The guards started to work. A painting of a dancing goddess was broken by the ignorant guards, not knowing that they were sabotaging a priceless painting. Miles stood aside, watching them damaging these precious paintings. He should do something to stop it but he couldn’t. He would get caught if he stood out and stopped them. Miles watched the guards quietly, feeling helpless. Finally, he couldn’t stand it anymore. He stepped out of the corner and started running once again. He stopped in front of a wall. To normal people, it might just be an ordinary wall, but Miles felt that there was something fishy with it. He pressed onto the wall. The wall automatically opened. What he saw amazed him.

Behind the wall was a room with loads of cave paintings! He stopped right in front of a painting with a woman holding a bow—like Jade. Then, he walked to another painting that contained a queen wearing a golden dress with a lot of servants. He smiled with satisfaction while looking at these wonderful paintings. A painting caught his eyes. There were words on the wall, “The special words will appear, only if you feel the fear. Read the words aloud, everyone sees you will bow.” Miles went on looking for the special words. His focus was on the painting. He thought for a moment. Suddenly, he realized that the paintings here all had names. He gathered the first letter in all the paintings. They came out like “un deseo será concedido”. Miles read the words aloud.

As soon as he finished reading, a woman appeared, “I can grant you a wish since you freed me, young man! What do you want?” the woman asked. Miles said he would like the Mogao Grotto to be back to normal since the guards had damaged it. “Young man, I like that you are not greedy. Of course, I can grant your wish, but let me add something to it.”

The Mogao Grotto became normal again. Right after that, a bright light appeared behind Miles. In seconds, Miles disappeared.

Since then, no one has ever seen Miles and the guards again.

# A Tale of Luoyang Cave Dwelling

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Man, Hoi Lam – 10*

Hi, I'm a ten years old girl living with Longmen in a cave called Luoyang Cave Dwelling. It's currently the 18th century. I enjoy living here a lot! The environment here— greenish trees, the soft tan colored sand, the homes...

Even the Longmen were so good-natured! Living here is just the BEST.

One normal morning, I was walking around the caves again. I have just finished some paintings for the Longmen. They were thanking me and inspecting my masterpiece. When I asked what I could help them with next, they said I could pick some vegetables from the Longmen farm. I agreed and went to the farm. I walked around the place but I found out... That I didn't know where the farm was! I was really perplexed and I continued looking around— Then, "POOF!"

I fell into a hole in a cave! "OW! THAT HURTS!" I looked at my bruised knees. I didn't even know where I was! I sat up rubbing my head and looked around. "Where is this place?" My voice echoed in the cave. This place seemed like it's underground... Now I can't even see light. I was petrified that I couldn't even find my way back again! But I have to try, as much as I could! I found a stick from the floor and scratched it on the stone wall. I made a torch. While holding the torch with my trembling hands, I walked around, exploring the cave. As I walked around, I accidentally bumped into one of the cave's walls. Then I looked at it, there was a cave carving! I looked closer at the dusty wall, and I understood more perspicuously. The carving was about the Longmen starting to build in this cave! They looked so peaceful and untroubled! "Hmm, this is kind of interesting", I said. But when I turned around to head away, I spotted a number of bats right in front of me. "AHHHH HELP!" I screamed at the top of my lungs as I fought through the cloud of bats. As I was dashing out of the cave, I caught a glimpse of some marbles on the floor. I didn't know what I needed them for, but I took them and put them in my pocket.

Finally, I was out of the cave, but there I had another problem. Gosh, there were criminal-looking people next to me! They were holding knives in front of me and commanded, "Give us all your money, or die!" I wasn't listening to them. I was still stunned by the environment. The tall grass, flowering meadows... I was quickly disturbed though. The criminals ordered again, "GIVE US ALL YOUR VALUABLES!"

I replied, "Sheesh! Give me a second first, you impatient culprits!" I looked through my pockets. All I have was those marbles I picked up from the cave! Suddenly, I had an idea. I immediately took out the marbles, threw them on the ground and started to run away. "Hey! Come back, you little child!" They chased after me with their irritated looks but slipped on the marbles. They criminals were more foolish than I thought! The marbles only lasted for a while though. It wasn't much for me to worry about, as I have another plan!

The plan was just so clever! While I looked around when I came out of the cave, I found a route back to my home. I ran back and shouted to the Longmen, "Hey, someone get some tree branches and give them to me!" After I snatched the branches from the Longmen, I went to the hole I fell into before and covered it with the branches. I stood next to the covered hole and waved to the criminals, "Hey, I'm over here! Come and—" I didn't even have to finish before they ran into the hole. Again, I heard that sound, "POOF!" Yep, they fell in again. While hearing their arguing sounds, I was laughing my heart out. Hope they have fun with the bats! The Longmen just stood in shock, stunned with what I did.

This day taught me to be careful with every one of my actions. If I did, things would work out even better for me. After this day, I was still laughing at those foolish criminals. The Longmen still haven't understood why this was so hilarious.

# Twins' Silk Road Quest

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Sheng, Tsz Yau Sophia – 9*

Once upon a time, there were twins living with their parents. Their names were Alice and Lucas. The twins were at school. Mrs Smith was talking about the Mogao Caves in China. Mrs Smith announced, “Students! Your homework today will be about Mogao Caves. I want everybody to write a report about Mogao Caves, and hand it in next Friday.”

“Not again!,” Lucas howled.

Mrs Smith regarded him coldly, “Yes, again. If you don’t like it, you might as well have 5 reports!”

As if she was saying, “Yes stupid, IF you don’t like it, I would rather give you 10 more reports.” Then without saying anything, she left the classroom.

As the twins walked home from school, Lucas complained, “We had a report like, 3 days ago, now another stupid report with another stupid topic and now off to the stupid library.”

“Come on Lucas! Reports are fun! You can learn a lot,” Alice proclaimed.

Lucas scoffed, “Oh yeah! They ARE so fun!”

Alice rolled her eyes at him while snickering, “Stop your sarcasm.”

Lucas thought out loud, “Today is Monday, the report is due on Friday, right? So I’ll probably do it... on Thursday.”

Alice cried out in disbelief, “That’s way too late, in fact I’m gonna do it today. Now follow me, we’re going to the library.”

“Ughh,” Lucas protested.

When they got in the library, Alice waved at the librarian, Mrs Johnson. She asked Alice peculiarly, “Who is this? I don’t think I’ve seen him.” As she said this, she pointed at Lucas.

“Oh that’s, uh my brother, Lucas.”

“Nice to meet you, Lucas.”

Alice inquired, “Are there any books about the Mogao Caves?”

“I don’t know, because today many kids rushed here to do their project, well they’re on the fourth row on shelf 3,” Mrs Johnson informed.

“Thank you, Mrs Johnson,” Alice’s voice trailed off as she went off in search of the book.

“Aha! There it is!” Alice exclaimed. Alice opened the book, and Lucas poked his head in just as his sister fell into the book.

Alice and Lucas got teleported into China, Silk Road, Dunhuang, Mogao Caves.

“WOAH! WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE WE!!!” screamed Lucas.

“Well ...” Alice looked around, “I think we’re at Mogao Caves, China, Dunhuang.”

“OK, time to go,” Lucas noted firmly as he dragged his sister away.

Suddenly, he stopped. “I don’t know where I’m going! This is frustrating!” Lucas yelled.

“So let’s stay for a while,” Alice grinned. Then she ran out of sight. Lucas found her in front of a big cave.

Alice declared, “Mogao Caves!” Then she ran inside.

Lucas panted in exasperation, “Is she crazy? Where did all that maniac energy even come from?” He searched in the cave for a long time, eventually, he found Alice. Alice was staring open mouthed at some paintings, Lucas immediately ran to her.

Lucas yelled, “What on earth were you thinking! I nearly lost you!”

“I want one....,” Alice murmured.

“What?,” Lucas demanded.

“I WANT TO TAKE A PAINTING HOME!!!!!!” Alice screamed.

Once she touched the painting, the whole ground shook.

Alice groaned, “ Oh no!”

Lucas echoed her, “Oh no!”

Standing right in front of them, was a ferocious looking dragon, staring daggers at them.

“Don’t just stand there, RUN!”

Alice didn’t move.

“OH COME ON!” Lucas bellowed.

Alice finally started moving. “I need to take back this painting!”

“Okay but unless you wanna die here extra crispy, you better hurry!,” Lucas hollered over his shoulder.

Alice stopped again.

“What now?” Lucas asked in an annoyed voice.

Alice lowered her head, “This is ancient history, I can't take it.”

“Oh, you finally realize that, now thanks to you we are on our way to the dead.”

“Stop yelling at me, Lucas, maybe if I just put back the painting, the dragon won’t chase us.”

So she quickly placed the painting in a corner of the room. Nevertheless, the dragon kept chasing them.

“Well I don’t know you but I'm leaving,” Lucas informed.

Alice caught her breath, “Wait for me!”

After dodging and diving, the twins finally escaped the cave.

“Whooo, that was close,” Lucas wiped his brow. “Now, how do we get home again?”

“Well, we came from our library from the book so let's try going to the Chinese library,” Alice suggested.

They went to the library and got a few raised eyebrows. The library somehow teleported the twins back to their home.

Alice celebrated, “YAY! Now I've got so much information about Mogao Caves!”

“Oh goody,” Lucas muttered under his breath.

Alice checked her watch, “ Hey, what time is it? What! It’s already Thursday! I have to finish my report!”

She dashed back home leaving Lucas alone.

“Hey! Wait for me!” Lucas yelled as he dashed after his sister.

# Tales from the Mogao

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Tseung, Kung Wing – 10*

One day in 1922, Dad, mom and I wanted to go to the Mogao Grottoes to explore inside and find treasures.

We arrived at the west side of China. The west side of China is cool, and it was filled with sand. We were very surprised when we saw that scene.

After we walked for a while, we were tired. We were sitting near a river with clear water. Then, a person walked by here. He was very ugly because his giant eyes could fall down at any time. He also had sharp teeth, smelly breath. He walked like a zombie towards us.

“Hi, would you like to make friends with me?” He said.

We always liked making friends with crazy people, so we also made friends together. We and the secret person walked into the small, long cave. We found the treasure (some ancient Chinese scrolls) at a corner in the cave, and we gave the treasure to the secret person to keep it for us. When we were walking in the shopping mall, the secret person took the treasure with him and jumped off the building.

For a moment, we still hadn’t found out that the secret person had disappeared. After we walked for a while, we turned back and looked, then we found that the secret person had disappeared! We went to the river, and we swam in the river so that we could see if the secret person was hiding in the river. Even though we swam in the river for one night, we still hadn’t found the secret person, so we decided to go to another place to find the secret person.

“Dad, when could we find the secret person?” I asked.

“I don’t know, but we will probably find him sometime!” Dad answered.

We were too tired to find him, so we went back to the building again to find him on every floor. Even though we kept finding him, we still couldn’t find him, so we found the security guard.

Mom asked the security guard, “Where is the secret person?”

“Who is the secret person?” The security guard asked.

“He walked like a zombie, had giant eyes that could fall down at any time, sharp teeth, smelly breath. He looked very ugly,” Mom answered her urgently.

“I know that person. We had been friends together for years. Although we don’t often see each other, we send letters to each other every day. I also had his WeChat. I could ask him now.” The security guard told us.

“He sent me a message that he is in a house. Good Luck!” The security guard answered us.

We rushed to a house and knocked on the door. The husband and the wife came out.

“What’s up?” The husband asked.

“I wanted to find a secret person,” Dad answered.

“He is under the bed right now, you can go in and see him,” The wife answered.

We walked onto the muddy floor. The bedroom is very neat and tidy, because the wife always cleans the bedroom. There is a vase filled with flowers. The flowers smelled very good. Besides that, there is also a wooden cupboard and a big and beautiful bed. We went under the bed, and walked slowly under the bed. Finally, we all saw the secret person, and he gave us back the ancient Chinese scrolls.

“Sorry,” The secret person said, “I will never steal things from you again.”

“Not from us, it is from everyone! You can never steal other people’s things!” My dad answered.

“Okay, no problem,” The secret person muttered.

Finally, we saved the treasure. We went home with the treasure, and we were all satisfied.

# The Legend of The Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Charmaine – 11*

It was almost the long-awaited summer vacation. The assessments ended 3 weeks ago and the year-end party is going to begin next month. As Aniya was discussing with her parents where she would go, her phone started buzzing.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Aniya! It’s Cindy. I was looking through some holiday destination pamphlets, and I came across this particular pamphlet for the Silk Road. It isn’t a guided tour but I already have a hotel in mind. It’s near the Mogao Grottoes. Legend says there is a secret room with valuable treasures within, but only the so-called ‘chosen ones’ can enter. It seems very intriguing so I will go there with my family. As I searched it up on google maps, I saw that the flight time was quite long, though. So, we could go there in mid-July. I was wondering if you wanted to go with me?” “Oh, that sounds interesting. After all, we will learn about China in P5. My mom said I could choose where we will go this summer too! Let’s go there!” Aniya said enthusiastically.

When the day came, the two families decided to meet up at the airport. They packed their bags excitedly and set off. Since it was already 10pm when they arrived, they moved into the hotel Cindy mentioned – Jiuquan Hotel, and the families settled in for the night.

The next morning, Aniya and Cindy’s family woke up early. Aniya and Cindy brought their lunches, water, two maps, two flashlights, and some snacks. They rode on a camel and secretly followed a group of hooded tour guides. After a few minutes they noticed the tour guides stopped at a temple which seemed to be engraved into the mountain. After they looked it up on their phones, they realized this was a renowned national park called the Mogao Grottoes. They decided to go in and take some pictures. However, when they walked into the cave, they were disappointed to find out that photo-taking was not allowed.

Once they went in, they were astonished by the scenery. There were colourful murals carved on the walls. It was nothing like what they expected. As they continued exploring, Aniya seemed to be hypnotized by the murals, and she ignored all of them and walked away all by herself. When she finally came back to her senses, she realized her mistake and tried to look for the group. But alas, she found nothing! She crept deeper into the Mogadishu Grottoes fearfully, getting more anxious each step. Little did she know someone was discreetly watching from afar...

“Mom? Dad? Cindy? Where are you all?” Aniya shouted in despair when she found something shining as bright as a thousand suns. The voice echoed across the halls like it was some sort of horror movie. As she crept closer, that light vanished into thin air. Suddenly, in the corner of her eye, she noticed the hooded tour guides around the corner. ‘Maybe they could assist me! After all, they are tour guides, right?’ Aniya sanguinely thought to herself.

She chased after the tour guides, but then they faded away like ashes after a raging fire broke out. She was all alone, again. As she ambled down the gloomy pathway, tears started filling her eye sockets.

“Where are you? Weren’t we supposed to go together? Say something! Shine a light! Anything!” she whimpered desperately.

Soon, she saw a statue that looked like the Big Buddha back in Hong Kong. It reminded her of all the pleasant and remarkable memories she had with her friends and family. Her tears slid down her rosy cheeks as she hoped for a miracle to happen when she saw a strange stone in front of her. Out of nowhere, the stone began gleaming luminously, and a pathway was soon revealed. She gathered herself together, and dashed across the concrete floor and up the stone stairs. She then saw a large human-size statue with two other statues stacked upon each other beside her. Abruptly, she saw the hooded tour guides appear again right in front of her.

“Come with us, Aniya,” they said sternly.

Aniya was full of doubts, but decided not to question it after all she had been through and followed them. They led her to a dark room with a dim light under a tarp. When they unveiled the tarp, the light source lit up the entire room! It was a room with statues of knights surrounding a Buddha. The two light sources glowed brightly as it revealed the surroundings within 100-meter radius.

“Woah... what is this place?” Aniya asked.

“This, this is the secret of life,” one of the tour guides said seriously, “This first one, is Dharma, and this other one, is Sangha. Dharma means the teaching of Buddha, and Sangha means the community of Buddhists. These are the treasures and secrets of the universe.” the tour guides said in unison.

Aniya saw the light getting brighter and brighter every second. She was dazed by the lights. Her head started to spin and soon she passed out...

“Aniya? Are you okay? Wake up!” Cindy’s voice echoed through Aniya’s head.

“H-huh? W-what happened?” Aniya stuttered while rubbing her eyes.

“Oh good, you’re awake! We were so worried about you! You fainted while you were admiring the murals! Come on! Do you need to go back to the hotel? Take a rest. Eat some food? Tell me!” Aniya’s mom asked Anita, concerned.

“Mom! I’m fine! It’s just that I couldn’t sleep well last night, I feel better now. I promise!” Aniya said, trying to calm everyone down.

“Okay, if you say so. Let’s continue now, please try and follow the group.” Aniya’s dad reminded.

Aniya felt relieved, ‘Phew, it was just a dream... I wonder if that...room is real?’ Aniya thought deeply, as she was following Cindy’s family and her parents.

# The Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Helen – 11*

Yes! I had finally convinced my two best friends, Alice and Isabelle, to go to the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang with me! Believe me, convincing them was not easy at all.

As soon as we arrived at the ticket office, Isabelle went to collect the tickets while Alice and I had a look on the map. Isabelle came rushing back, mixed emotions showing on her bright face. She didn't even wait for our questions when she exclaimed, "The ticket selling guy gave me this key without noticing! Let's see what it opens when we explore the Mogao Grottoes!" The key was a calming, dreamy shade of blue mixed with light purple, in a swirl marble pattern, which was an unusual colour for a key. I took the key from Isabelle. It felt cool against my hands, and I could feel carvings on the head of the key, but when I looked closely, I couldn't find any carvings against the metal. I felt weirdly confident and delighted when I held the key. The feeling was so mesmerising that I couldn't imagine how I even survived without that feeling of joy. Alice and Isabelle argued with each other about who should keep the key safe, and I was gleeful when they decided that I should keep it.

We went to the Ci Shi Tower first. That's the tower right in front of the entrance. Alice exclaimed at the structure of the building. She said, "This is the signature tower of the Mogao Grottoes! I've done some research and I found a lot of information about it!" She babbled on about how the structure was unique, and the colour of the building was beautiful. I had to try very hard to keep my mouth shut from shouting out that this was just a normal building. Isabelle rolled her eyes at me, and I mouthed, "Don't ruin this for her! She thinks it's so wonderful."

After Alice finally finished "appreciating" the tower, we were relieved to be able to set the foot to the inside. I decided to focus on exploring the magnificent grottoes instead of just looking for a place for the key to fit. "I also did some research on this, and I heard that the murals inside the caves are very impressive. They cover a lot of Chinese elements and a few of the murals also show Indian elements in terms of the painting techniques." I said proudly. Then, seeing the expression on their faces, I mumbled, "Of course, it may be very boring." I personally enjoyed art, but from all the boring art projects we did at school, I could understand why they hated art as everyone else did. If it's not from the pleasure of being good at it, I would have hated the school's art as they did. Suddenly, to my surprise, Isabelle said slowly, "I guess it may be interesting. Yeah, I'm in." Isabelle saw the doubt in Alice, and said to her, "Aww, come on! It might be interesting." Alice gave a small sigh and followed us reluctantly.

We explored the murals, and they were quite fun actually. We found a small hole on one of the walls, and it shaped like a keyhole, too. I tried to push the key in, but it didn't fit. We found several small holes like the first, but all of them didn't fit the key. In one of the holes, the pastel key managed to get in half of the hole, we gave a small intake of breath, but no matter how hard we tried, the key just wouldn't go in anyone. After 9 times of failure, Alice said, "This is too much of a disappointment. We should just give up." Isabelle cried, "No! We can't give up! This key must lead to something, right?"

After another 7 times of coming to nothing, we walked slowly to the exit. I said sadly, "We've already explored everything in the Mogao Grottoes. Where else could the key lead to?" When we were nearly at the exit, we saw an old man selling souvenirs. A box with red and orange swirly marble patterns caught my eye. I whispered to Alice and Isabelle, "Do you guys think that the key may fit this box? I mean, it doesn't have a key with the box as a set, and they both have swirly patterns, too!" I asked the old man, "Is it possible to try out this key in your box?" He replied with an "Of course" and a smile. I took a deep breath and pushed the key inside. With a click sound, I knew I had succeeded.

I paid the old man, and bought the box. Inside was a small model of the Mogao caves, and it was completely made of wood, very rare, colourful wood! Every detail of the model was such a fabulous combination of colours and patterns. Luckily, my two friends weren't the jealous type, or else they would be arguing about who should keep the box! I told them that I would put it to good use, "I'll create an artwork and make a video of it. I promise I'll keep the beautiful memories of this trip and our friendship in the future!"

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Jannie – 10*

Long long time ago, clever Amelia and her rich parents who were retired officials decided to go to Mogao Grottoes to explore since they knew that it was well known. They were walking and glancing around and found Mogao Grottoes very interesting. They loved Mogao Grottoes and immediately planned to go there again next time. Again?

When they were at Mogao Grottoes, they went into every fascinating cave which was different sized. They saw and looked at the things inside it. "These are so old styled stuff! Appealing!" Amelia exclaimed. They came to another cave and looked around like what they did when they went in the caves before, but this time was so different, the cave was so big and they weren't able to see the end of it. Then they walked and walked and got lost.

After getting lost, they were not in the enormous cave anymore but saw another cave with a poor man dressed in damaged clothes inside. They tried to ask the poor man, "Excuse me mister, do you know where to leave?" but the door suddenly closed by itself so they kept thinking of the solution.

After meeting the poor man, they discovered that it was the treasure house since they heard that there was a treasure house in Mogao Grottoes that the door is able to close by itself. Amelia and her parents thought the treasure house was so genius that could help them magically leave, the poor man was so kind hearted because he quickly found a treasure bit for them but unexpectedly, it did not work as it was expected.

After that, they saw a box and opened it they saw a golden coloured key. The poor man gave them a hint that it was the key for the door and Amelia and her parents guessed it. They immediately opened the weird door then saw a map right in front of the door. They picked it up and took some treasure from the treasure house and put it into their backpacks. They also invited the poor nice man to live together with Amelia and her parents. They met the emperor and gave him the treasure so the emperor treated them ten thousand dollars as a reward.

Lastly, Amelia and her parents gave the man food, clothes and half of the money the emperor gave them. The man was not poor after and they all lived happily ever after.

# New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Wong, Lok Ching Serena – 9*

Hundreds and hundreds of years ago, there was a deserted cave on top of a cliff, the people in the town just saw it as a lonely place which had nothing interesting. But a monk named Yuezun had a vision of a thousand radiant Buddhas on the cliff face, and he decided that there was something special about the Mogao Caves, that inspired him to begin excavating the caves.

A year later, Yuezun was still thinking about his designs.

Yuezun thought to himself, "I'll never be able to finish this, I'm hopeless. Why did I even want to do this anyways!"

He angrily walked around finding a place to stay since he left his home to live in the cave. He passed by a China palace while looking for a place to stay. He curiously looked inside and found a monk, the monk was called Faliang. He asked Faliang if he wanted to join him, and Faliang agreed! They went back to the cave and talked about his vision, but after that Faliang knew that it would be impossible to finish it so he decided to look for more people to help.

After many months of looking (almost a year), they finally found a person that was willing to help, her name was Yannie, she lived in Japan (yes, they traveled to many countries just to find her.) Yannie was a great asset to the team, and she helped Yuezun with the designs and the structure of the build. While Faliang was helping him build it, everything was going well until they ran out of materials.

Yannie said, "There's no more materials for me and Faliang to build, but you shall not worry because I will travel to get all the stuff we need."

When she was looking for her last material, Yannie went to France to get materials, but she did not know the Anglo-French wars were there; therefore, she got badly injured.

A week had passed and Yannie still has not returned. Faliang and Yuezun started to get worried. They both decided to check on Yannie to see if she was okay. When they found Yannie, she was lying on the ground unconscious, they were panicked when suddenly a soldier appeared behind them and offered some help. They took Yannie to the nearest hospital and let her heal for a week.

After Yannie had healed, they went to another country to get the last material. They got it after three days and travelled back to China. They finished building the Mogao Grotto cave after 2 months. Yuezun thanked Faliang and Yannie for their help and sent them back home.

# Endless Caves

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Yan, Hei Hugo – 9*

Have you ever been to the Mogao Caves? No? Then let me tell you a story about it.

One day, in the far, far, future, there was a group of four children, eager to go on any adventure. Once, they had gotten into a secret base belonging to the military. Their parents were not very pleased. Well, their parents were top scientists that were working on a time machine. They had a prototype in their house that was very buggy. The kids thought that the prototype was a real time machine. They decided to ride their time machine to the 1900s to impress some people with the super advanced technology from the future. Without permission, they climbed onto the machine and they headed off into the past. As usual, the prototype malfunctioned, and they were whisked off to the ancient Mogao Caves, in the medieval times.

Let's get to know the kids. One of the kids was called Daniel. He was often the leader of the group. He was very brave and fearless, although he was not very bright. Cammy was an explorer that liked to take risks; however, she was very clumsy. Ben was the brightest of the four. He was a bit shy sometimes. Tiffany was quick witted and energetic. She sometimes would run off all by herself, leaving the others behind.

Year : 1900

Place: Mogao Caves, Cave 36, Dunhuang, China

"W—where are we?", Ben asked, stumbling out of the rubble.

"Umm...Is it the Mogao caves?" Tiffany asked.

It was dark and spooky inside the caves, and it was like a maze so no one could get out. They were trapped inside the cave, with only a month's rations left. The time machine was broken, so they had to build one from scratch.

The boulder led them to a huge room. There was a skylight at the top. They used whatever they could find, books, rocks, and paper. They climbed to the top. Daniel sighed and pulled out the ball from his pocket. The ball emitted a faint glow. It started to shine.

They were being transported to the future! They were safe at last, running into their parents' arms.

# The Adventure in the Mogao Grottoes

*Po Leung Kuk Hong Kong Taoist Association Yuen Yuen Primary School, Zhang, Rachel – 11*

It was a summer holiday. My friend, Tia and I were sitting on a train to Dunhuang. How my friend managed to entice me to see the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang for the holidays, I did not know, but according to Tia, Dunhuang's caves were one of the most amazing places in the world.

When we arrived in Dunhuang, all I saw was sands, sands and sands. I was about to point out that this place didn't look as amazing as it was described, my best friend exclaimed, "Wow! This place is SO beautiful! Just look at the sand! They're not too light. They're not too dark. They are the most beautiful shade of yellow. And look! Don't the sand piles look like waves?" I nodded my head, not wanting to burst Tia's bubble, "So why don't we explore the Mogao Grottoes?"

We walked along the road to find a closed cave. Tia sighed, "Pity. This was one of the most wonderful caves here in Dunhuang." I nodded, pretending to know what she was talking about. Just then, my best friend's face lit up. "Rachel!" she cried out loud, "Let's just sneak in there!" "Are you sure, Tia? I mean, it's closed after all," I replied. However, my friend seemed to be obsessed with the idea of going into the closed cave as she later on pulled me in there with her.

Nothing odd happened at first. However, when Tia just started to enjoy herself, looking happily at the beautiful pictures on the wall, she suddenly tripped over something. "Ah!" cried Tia. Then came a flash of lighting. Tia and I were surrounded by the mist. It was extremely thick, even if I placed my hands in front of my eyes, I wouldn't been able to see them. "Tia!" I cried in the mist. "I'm here!" a voice echoed across the room. I made my way towards her voice. "I hope the mist will clear soon, Tia," I whispered to her. However, after a long time, the mist did not disappear. Tia and I were trying desperately to clear the fog by fanning our hands, but still, the mist thinned very slowly. When it disappeared, the paintings on the walls were gone. Around Tia and me were the ghost versions of the pictures on the wall.

"Hello girls," said one of the ghosts, "Thank you for freeing us from the pictures." Tia and I were too stunned to speak. When I finally found my voice again, I said, "Are you good guys or bad guys?" The ghosts gave out a snort of laughter. "This is no story, children!" cried another ghost, "How famous are we now?"

"Very famous I guess?" I muttered, "but I don't get it how all of you are as impressive as Tia described." That earned me a kick from Tia. "Oh, no! Don't say that!" she cried desperately, "I thought I convinced you that the Mogao Grottoes are amazing!" A ghost shook its head, "We, the flying apsaras, may not be amazing, but our friends are!" With that it pulled Tia and me out of the cave to explore the others.

Tia and the flying apsaras pulled me into the 257 cave. There were paintings of very colorful deer. "Every picture has its own story, and these paintings represent the stories of the nine-colored deer," explained Tia. "Very good indeed!" smiled an apsara, "and here is the story of it..."

"Once upon a time, there was a greedy merchant. He was lost in a storm and was losing hope. Suddenly he saw a radiant deer, gleaming with color. The nine-colored deer helped the merchant get out of danger in exchange for not telling others its place. However, when the king announced that whoever could tell him where the nine-colored deer was, the merchant gave in to his greed and led the way to where the deer was. When the deer was caught, she asked the king how they found her. The king told the deer that the merchant led the way. Feeling betrayed, the nine-colored deer told the king the whole story. Horrified by the fact that there was such a despicable person in his country, the king banished the merchant from his country and made sure that no one would ever harm the nine-colored deer again."

"So, the story teaches us that people who break vows and promises wouldn't have a good ending," concluded Tia. I nodded, deep in thought. "So, what do you think about the Mogao Grottoes now?" asked an apsara slyly. I snapped out of my daze, "It's amazing, but I'm still not impressed." The flying apsaras signed, "Looks like I have more work to do..."

In spite of my denial, I was actually deeply impressed by the Mogao Grottoes. As I watched the stunning sunset, across the Dunhuang Desert, I thought, the traditional Chinese culture was definitely magnificent.

# Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

*Po On Commercial Association Wan Ho Kan Primary School, Cho Hei, Kwong Cho – 10*

Mogao grottoes, a tunnel to the lost world, holds breath taking secrets and stories of religious, commercial, and cultural exchange of the ancient Silk Road.

It all started when a Buddhist monk named Le Zun was crossing the Gobi Desert on his journey to the Western Paradise. He found a special spring which allowed him to quench his thirst. There he saw the image of Maitreya Buddha in the sky, with a thousand beaming Buddhas emerging and fairies playing heavenly music. He was greatly impressed and decided to stay and make the first cave with his painting and sculpturing skill. Years later, more Buddhist monks came and carved more caves with detailed paintings and amazing sculptures, which made it quickly a pilgrimage site for not only monks, but also for traders and artists.

It has a significant cultural heritage as it includes different types of art such as architectures, murals and sculptures. These masterpieces dates back to a period of over a thousand years, from the 5th to the 14th century. The art style of the murals and sculpture is very unique as it combines both foreign cultures with traditional Chinese art. One of the examples is the art of flying fairies. Most Chinese traditional art involves people in full traditional Chinese clothing. However, the paintings also show clothing from other cultures like Tibetans, Indians and even Turks. It shows great cultural diversity of the Mogao Caves. Moreover, the sculptures of Buddhas are mind blowing as they are massive, often accompanied with devas, heavenly kings and other mythical creatures. It certainly shows fascinating details with incredible historic value. This also has great impact on literature. The best known manuscripts of the Mogao Caves are the Dunhuang manuscripts. It is one of the greatest treasure troves of ancient documents found. Surprisingly, not all of them are Buddhist scripts and it also contains a large amount of administrative documents, including a lot of Confucian and Taoist manuscripts that were previously unknown or thought lost, which greatly contribute to the Chinese literature. They also offer insights of both religious and secular matters of ancient China which give us a glimpse into the lives of people back then.

Having witnessed the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties, The Mogao grottoes bares the history of Buddhism and also shows the cultures, art, religions and civilizations in ancient China. It carries not only historic values, but also shows the interaction among China and other cultures in Asia.

## Flying

*Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Chu, Tsz Ho – 11*

It was at the dawn of early spring, You ring the morning Bell, waking me up, I have not seen your face in the chaos, you have disappeared in the mist, Perhaps, in the middle of summer noon, you shine everywhere, burn me, glorious light stabbing my gaze, you have disappeared in a sparkle of color. Perhaps, in the late autumn dusk, you unload the sunset, send me to sleep, hazy I have not seen your appearance, you have disappeared in the twilight. Perhaps, it was in the dead of a winter night when you carried in the wind and snow and froze me. Though my eyelids were not closed in the numbness, you disappeared into the darkness. You appeared shuddered suddenly disappeared when I was happy, leaving me delighted. You sometimes fly away, but I care, and you are sometimes close at hand. But I forgot, you Came from the Dunhuang Murals, you rebound PIPA flying into the nine days.

# Dream back to The Mogao Grottoes

*Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Qi, Jiang Rui – 10*

I dream that I went back to the past, and I was in Mogao Grottoes with people.

I saw them digging Mogao Grottoes, and I joined their team. I wanted to paint something with an auspicious meaning, celebrating my motherland, family, and myself in a meaningful way.

I also want to carve some Buddha statues and then worship them piously to pray for my family, free from disease and disaster. In this way, I painted many murals and carved many Buddha statues. The whole cave can be regarded as a treasure house. I think my cave is genuinely an “auspicious treasure house.”

# Open the World of Mogao Grottoes

*Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Song, Zi Yi – 12*

Today is the first day of the National Day holiday. My parents and I will visit the famous scenic spot of the Mogao Grottoes in China.

My father booked the tickets the night before we left. After we packed up, we went shopping in the supermarket. After 3 p.m., we set out from Shenzhen to Dunhuang City, Gansu Province. This journey is too slow and long! It took about thirty-three hours to reach the destination. It was already more than ten o'clock in the evening. My family and I stayed in the hotel we had made an appointment in advance. To not wait a long time, we got up at seven in the morning and took a bus to Mogao Grottoes after breakfast. I am thrilled and looking forward to it! Let's start a wonderful trip to Mogao Grottoes! You must have heard legends about the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, such as King's corpse cutting meat to save pigeons, the prince Sarina sacrificing his life to feed tigers, 500 robbers becoming Buddhas, and Zhang Qian's mission to the western regions. Before going out, my father and I talked about many famous Dunhuang murals, such as flying fairies, nine colored deer, buildings of the Tang Dynasty, flying Buddha statues and landscape paintings, and various graphics and patterns. The colorful murals in the photos surprised me, but I knew how spectacular it was when I really came to the Dunhuang murals. The retro colors, the soft lines, the ever-changing characters, and the vast pavilions. In addition to a large area of murals. I also saw some Buddha stone carvings. After observation, I found that many Buddha statues' eyes are closed or half-open. Why? I asked my father about this, my father told me that the Buddha closed his eyes because people closed their eyes when they settled, so when building the Buddha, they closed their eyes. How interesting!

When I visited the Mogao Grottoes, I thought of a poem, "thousands of Mogao Grottoes are lined with singing sand, and the cliffs are covered with colorful clouds. Outside the Cuimeng Pavilion Road of Populus, the ninth floors are connected with sunlight", to praise the Mogao Grottoes.

# Children Who Left Stories of New Tales of the Mogao Grottoes

*Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Wu, Yancheng – 10*

## ***People in the book :***

**Ben**—Teacher in the team, he likes writing very much!

**Peter**—Children tourist group's captain always brings a notebook everywhere.

**Emma**—The youngest child in the team, but she is the cleverest.

**Sam**—Peter's younger brother is the richest boy on the team.

## ***Chapter 1 Begin Travel***

On a warm day, Peter was at home with his mom. "Mom," he said, "I'm bored!" His mom thought a moment and said, "Do you want to travel with your friend?" Peter jumped, "Yes, I do! Hooray!" "So tomorrow, you need to ask some of your friends to get them to an agreement, OK?" Peter smiled, "OK!"

The next day, Peter woke up very early to ask his friends. At last, the names on the paper were "Emma," "Sam," and "Peter." The adult's name was "Ben." He reported to his mom, and his mom said, "Excellent! You can go tomorrow!"

(In video call)

Ben: Is everybody here? Let's make a roll call. Peter?

Peter: Here!

Ben: Emma?

Emma: Here!

Ben: Sam?

Sam: H-E-R-E, here!

Ben: Hahaha, everybody is here. Let's begin our meeting now. We will start our trip tomorrow, at 9:00 a.m.

Emma: Where should we meet?

Ben: Mmmmm, you need to take your luggage with you and wait at your house's door. I will catch a taxi to take us to the airport. OK?

Sam, Peter, and Emma: OK! Bye!

## ***Chapter 2 Begin Travel***

(On the taxi)

"Where are we going?" asked Sam, "Where is it?" "We are going to the Mogao Grottoes!" Ben said, "It is 25km southeast of Dunhuang City, Gansu Province." Emma said, "I know something about Mogao Grottoes: Mogao Grottoes, commonly known as the Thousand Buddha Cave, is in Dunhuang at the west end of the Hexi corridor. There are 735 caves, 45,000 square meters of murals, and 2,415 clay-colored sculptures." "Wow, Emma, you are very clever!" said Peter. "We are ready to get on the airplane, come on!" said Ben, "Let's get off the taxi now."

Three hours later, they were at Gansu airport. "Wow! I can't believe I arrived in Gansu Province, where the mysterious Mogao Grottoes are, so soon!" said Ben, "Let's catch a taxi to the Mogao Grottoes!"

Ten minutes later, they were at the Mogao Grottoes. "Let's get in!" they said. "Wow, it's amazing," said Sam, as he touched the wall painting. There was a big hole on the wall, and the wall ate Sam! "OH! My god! Sam!" They tried to help Sam, but they were eaten by the wall too. Wow, they flew to a strange place with many old buildings! Emma

said, "This is ancient China." What an exciting thing! They saw so many flying Apsaras in the sky, and the buildings looked the same as the Mogao Grottoes.

They said "Hello" to the flying Apsaras, but they had no response. It seems they can't listen to their voice. They fly and dance peacefully and beautifully. There are even some flying Apsaras playing Chinese musical instruments.

Suddenly, Peter jumped and then he couldn't stand on the ground. He was flying! They followed him, and everyone was flying, too!

### ***Chapter 3 Real Travel***

Ben looked at his watch, and it was time to close, and suddenly they were back to the outside of the Mogao Grottoes. They found this was just a video of the grottoes, and they could begin to watch the real Buddha Statue now. After they saw the Flying Apsaras, they could understand the beauty of the wall painting very well now.

What an excellent art record! Ancient China had many exceptional artists.

Emma told everybody, "This is the most famous painting in the world. The ancient people used the natural material to color the wall painting." And the Buddha Statue looked real. When you look at their eyes, they say something to let people have inner peace.

### ***Chapter 4 Get a Map***

After 3 hours, they were tired, and they looked around and found a small room, and there were four chairs, and they were so tired that they all fell asleep. In the dream, they saw the old buildings and flying Apsaras again. What another exciting thing! But this time, the flying Apsaras could talk with them. They told them that ancient China was very good at painting and they just recorded a small part in the Mogao, and for more good paintings you can look for in China, that means there are some places have that more painting, but now we don't know where they are! And they gave them a map to look for them.

They woke up, and they found a map in everybody's hand!

### ***Chapter 5 Back Home***

Peter told everybody that it was time to go back home, and he suggested looking for the paintings on the map again when they were back home. Everyone said this was a good idea! They looked at their map and found only one part on everyone's map, so they should add up and work together. After this, they caught a taxi to the airport and returned home. Everyone still thought about the plane's magic dream, the flying Apsaras, and the old buildings they saw in the plan.

# Another Me in the Mogao Grottoes

*Regents Primary School of Shenzhen, Zhu, Sze Kei – 12*

Emily: An ordinary pupil, she is the protagonist, that is, me.

Selina: This is my sister. She is an ordinary college student.

Dad: He is the person who organized the trip.

Another Emily: She is severe and seems to be behind the plot.

## Chapter 1

It's sunny today. Dad said to us, "look, how nice the weather is today!" My sister and I replied perfunctorily, "The weather is perfect." Dad leaned forward and said, "You stay at home every day. It's time to take you out to play." I looked up at him. Dad smiled and said, "Let's travel to Mogao Grottoes!"

## Chapter 2

The weather in Dunhuang is so hot that my hair is sweaty. My sister complained, "Dad, when do we have to line up to get in?" Dad replied, "Soon, don't worry." I looked at the entrance, and there seemed to be a force attracting me, which made the cold wrap my whole body.

## Chapter 3

The initially clear sky began to turn black, and we also entered the mogao grottoes. I saw a lot of Buddhas. They are very exquisite. I also saw the murals on the wall. They are the same as the characteristics of Buddhas statues. Their artistry is superb. Suddenly, the world I saw became dark. I only heard a girl's evil laughter. I turned around and saw a girl wearing the same clothes coming towards me. Like two peas, I saw her facial features were the same as mine! I trembled and asked, "Who are you?" The girl smiled and replied, "I'm you, the other you." "What do you want?" I asked. "What do I want to do?" She stared at me. "I want to replace you." I opened my mouth wide and looked at her in horror. "You are a cowardly waste!" She yelled at me. "I have ambition. I can win, I can win, I can achieve, I can do many things you can't do! Why do you control my body?" There was an evil smile on her face. She said, "now, I'm going to take back what belongs to me."

## Chapter 4

The scene around me began to become dear. Is creamed. My father and sister were bleeding and lying on the ground in pain. The Buddhas statues around are also stained with bright blood. Dad stared at me with bloodshot eyes and shouted, "You're a murderer!" dad didn't care about hope. He vented his hatred to me with his eyes. At this time, I noticed that I had a knife in my hand. Suddenly, my trembling hands became out of control and slowly stabbed me in my stomach. My pupils suddenly shrunk, and pain filled my whole body.

## Chapter 5

"Emily! Emily!" cried, my father. I opened my eyes and saw my father and sister sitting next to me. "God, you scared me." I looked around and found that the Buddhas around me were no longer covered with blood but seemed to have come back to life and looked at me kindly. I thought to myself: they saved me. But then I heard a gentle laugh that made my blood run cold.

# Anaisa

*Renaissance College, Stone, Esme – 10*

Dear Alzin Bruschel,

We regret to inform you that your friend, Brother Bodhin, though you may have known him as “Canjel Aconis”, had been missing for a week until Brother Caldane found him in the Mogao Caves. He was alerted by a flash of bright light omitted from a part of the caves that we had not searched.

Brother Bodhin’s body seemed to have transformed into a statue. We knew it was the real Brother Bodhin because the statue was dressed in his robes and the satchel contained his tiny ink bottle and two of the letters that I have enclosed within. The other was found in his hand. The ring mentioned in the letters was nowhere to be seen.

Brother Bodhin was found surrounded by other statues of monks that had gone missing some years ago. They were all found in positions of agony on the floor.

Perhaps he was misguided in his way of thinking about how to reach nirvana. Brother Bodhin followed the path of the others who became statues, and now nirvana remains forever unreachable.

Buddha bless you,

Brother Banzan  
Mogao Caves Monastery

# Tales From the Mogao Grottoes

*Renaissance College, Wong, Kityu – 9*

Friday 21 March, 1899

It was a cheerful day at Meijo School of Fairies and Anna, an air fairy, just finished her history class. She had never liked history before, particularly human history. But today her history teacher, Mr. Heb, talked all about the Mogao Caves. She was fascinated by the paintings and sculptures inside the caves that Mr. Heb explained to the class. However, the books in the classroom never told them where exactly the caves were. The book was written when the caves were built, so everybody knew where they were and as a result, they didn't need to write the location. They only wrote about how wonderful they were and Anna wanted with all her heart to be the first one to find them. As she was an air fairy, she could fly there. Plus, she was also the best in every single class except for History. She definitely could find it! She was just heading to the cafeteria for lunch when Atona, her best friend, showed up: "Hi, Anna! Where are you going?"

"To lunch! You wanna sit with me?" Anna replied.

"Sure!" Atona was also an air fairy, but unlike Anna, she wasn't the best in the class. However, Atona was sportier, better at flying, and could also swim better than Anna. Those two were the best possible pair!

"Hey Atona?"

"Yeah?"

"Have you ever thought of being the first one to find the Mogao Caves?"

"If I knew where they were, it would be a piece of cake. But I don't have the knowledge to find out."

"What if I found out and we went together?"

Atona thought about it for a while and then said: "Sure, but we are not allowed to skip class! Plus, we only have the weekends off, and I am guessing that 2 days is not enough!"

Anna replied easily "I thought about it already. We can go during the Easter holidays. I have three whole weeks to research, then we can use one week to travel."

"Ok!" Atona smiled and the two friends went off to lunch.

\*\*\*

It was nighttime and Anna was lying on her bed in her dorm. All she could think about was the Mogao Caves. Anna knew one of her ancestors must have been a painter or something in the caves, because she once read a book taken from her house's store room about working in the beautiful caves. She remembered it was signed: Mara, but had no idea who that was. She was thinking about going home on Saturday and asking her mom about this. But for today, she was really tired after flying, so she fell asleep easily.

Saturday 22 March, 1899

"MOM! I am HOME," Anna shouted. Anna heard her mom coming down the stairs. "Hi sweetheart! Go and eat some of the lozenges I just made! Honey flavoured, your favourite!"

"Thanks, mom, but I wanna ask something."

Anna's mom stopped where she was and asked with suspicion, "Yes?"

Hesitantly, Anna said, "Do you know who Mara is?"

“Oh! Surprised you should ask. She was your grandma’s grandmother's mother. A bit confusing, but basically she was your very old ancestor. She was also a painter in the Mogao Caves! Being a painter in the caves had very high pay, and they left amazing artwork behind. Only one out of 100 people could have that job, so she was probably the most famous ever in our family.”

Anna smiled: “Does she know where the Caves are?”

Her mom thought deeply and then said, “She did write where it was at the very front of her book about the caves. The book is... ummm ....” Anna’s mom pulled out something from a box and then said: “Here.”

Anna grabbed the book and looked. “WHAT! It’s in Dun Huang, Gan Su? But that is only a 1 hour flight! Me and Atona can get there in no time!”

\*\*\*

Anna rushed through the clouds and flew right back to Meijo School. She found Atona looking for things to bring, and Anna rushed to tell her, “Let’s go!”

“Go where?” Atona asked, confused.

“Dun Huang! Mogao Caves! Just go, bring your water and let’s leave!” Atona quickly filled up her water bottle and she flew up in the air. “Lead the way then Anna!”

They flew, and before they knew it, they reached Dun Huang. “Ok, Atona, here we are. Listen closely!” Like cats and bats and owls and fowl creatures like wolves, fairies had excellent hearing, especially Atona. They listened through the sand for the hollow sound of empty caves, especially those nearby the many oases of the desert. They made it through almost the whole desert, when suddenly, Atona shouted, “Listen! A hollow sound!”

They dug and dug and they tried to find the caves, and when all hope seemed lost, Anna remembered something. “Hey Atona, take your water and pour it on the sand.” Atona did what she was asked and slowly, the stone caves began to appear from the sand. They were so excited and they continued breaking the sand up around the clear stone figures. After hard work and one hand after another, they finally finished one small cave. The joy of finally finding a cave gave them a burst of determination to find more. Even if they were fascinated by the paintings and sculptures, they knew they needed to keep being archeologists. Hours passed and they finally finished the whole thing. They were too tired to fly back, so they used a magic wind to carry them all the way home.

Everyone kept asking them questions about the caves, but the sculptures and artwork were too precious to be told. Thanks to Anna and Atona, the Mogao Caves were once again open to the world to discover and marvel over.

# The Treasures of the Mogao Grottoes

*Renaissance College, Wong, Ella – 10*

Treasure. The thought ploughed through Richard's mind as he wandered through the museum. He was looking for the new exhibit about the Mogao Grottoes. Treasure. Yes, he told himself, he'd get to treasure soon. The museum had announced that it had unearthed priceless treasures in the Mogao Caves, and Richard loved treasure. What could it be? He wondered. Gleaming gold coins, or shiny round jewels? Costly bolts of silk, or animal skins?

He quickly glanced around. The lights were all off, the world pitch black, illuminated only by the frail beam of his torchlight. His footsteps echoed eerily on the marble floor tiles. Richard loved treasure, yes, and he'd go to extraordinary lengths to get it. The new exhibit wasn't due to open to the public until tomorrow. Richard simply couldn't wait that long. Excitement sent chills snaking down his spine, and tension buzzed in the air. Richard was greedy, he couldn't deny it. And he wanted the museum's treasure, even though he knew it was wrong. Richard was a thief with a liking for money—and whatever he could sell for some.

Heart pounding, he pushed open the polished oak doors that led to the new exhibit. A bright yellow banner strung above the doorway proudly proclaimed, *Mogao Grottoes Exhibit. Discover the wonders of the past!*

The room was large and circular, and the walls—gleaming with mosaic tiles arranged into pictures of monks shrouded in their vibrant, amber-orange robes, as if they were wrapped in molten sunlight, meditating with peaceful smiles on their faces—were lined with shelves. Richard shone his torchlight onto the shelves. Half of them carried small stone statues and bright painted icons, all of a smiling Buddha. On the other half, hundreds of scrolls rested on the shelves, each one emblazoned with words in flowing black ink. There were poems and stories and quotes of wisdom, but Richard didn't care about that. He shook his head in disgust and his gaze fell on the glass box in the middle of the room.

The glass box's bottom was embedded with white lights that would shine dazzlingly when the museum opened, throwing its treasure into a beam of brilliant light. Richard swallowed. His breathing quickened; his heart went so fast and so hard he was certain it was going to burst out of his chest. He wondered that it didn't give him away; surely someone must have heard it?

Slowly, he shone his torch into the glass box... For a moment he didn't dare breathe. He looked, and looked again. His eyes stared disbelievingly, and confusion furrowed his brow. Was this a joke? Inside the glass box lay a wrinkled piece of paper, yellowed by age, the edges charred and black. It looked like a decaying tooth. Richard wanted to splutter in shock, but he clenched his teeth. The slightest sound and he'd give himself away. Words danced across the seemingly worthless paper, written in ink as black as night.

Richard leaned forwards. This isn't treasure! His mind screamed, but his heart told him to read it. His gaze roving over the yellowed paper, he began to read the coal-coloured words.

*Be grateful for what you have.*

That was it?

Richard's mind churned, trying to explain how this useless piece of paper was treasure. Slowly, it dawned on him that what the paper said actually made...sense. Lots of sense.

He thought about what he had. He had a family who loved him and who had no idea what he was doing now. Guilt twisted his heart into knots. He had enough money to live for a month, and after that he could easily find a decent job. He remembered quitting two years ago, convinced his salary wasn't enough, and turning to a life of crime. More guilt; it stole his breath, made his stomach churn, clogged up his throat. He had so much compared to people who had so little; some people had no home and no money and no food or water to drink, and here he was—he had all that and still he wanted more.

How could he have been so greedy, so selfish? More importantly, what was he doing at this time, taking the treasure before others could enjoy it? Everyone had a right to learn from this paper and its benevolent wisdom.

In that moment, Richard made a silent vow to himself. He wouldn't do this again. He couldn't. All his life he'd been chasing after money and jewels and things he could sell, but what good had his money ever done him? It hadn't

given him any happiness at all. Instead, the more riches he accumulated, the bigger the yawning hole in him stretched: the chasm that hungered for even more money, and yet grew bigger and greedier with each coin that fell into it.

Everything was crystal clear now. Silently, he thanked the infinite wisdom and the incredible insight the paper held—its true treasure, he realised—and slipped away to walk home.

Moonlight washed his steps in beams whiter than milk and the stars winked down at him from above. As he looked at them, Richard felt a sense of wonder that he'd never felt before. He'd always taken the sky for granted, but maybe he shouldn't. He was lucky to have been born a human, on Earth. Richard thought for a while, bouncing with happiness. He already had all the treasures in the world. His family loved him more than anything, he was perfectly healthy, and now he understood what he had, every inch of him was filled to the brim with joy and gratitude.

The future might rob him of all of that, but right now, in this moment, Richard knew only how to be thankful.

And he understood that what he had was priceless; more expensive than any amount of gold.

# In Search of Immorality that Led to a Death

*S.K.H. St. Peter's Primary School, Cheung, Gabriel Ka Ho – 11*

In 366 AD, a monk was travelling along the Silk Road. Suddenly, he saw a vivid vision flashing in such detail and elaborate visuals. He could no longer fall asleep and was lured into a cave and started painting, engraving and carving all the mysteries that had come to him.

Waking up in an empty bed, Philip decided to sign up for a long holiday to the Silk Road. He had to get away from all the familiarity, after the divorce.

He always thought it was just a cave, but he didn't know it encompassed a collection of 492 caves. On the third day of the trip, he was at the famous Mogao Caves. He and other tourists were being introduced to their guides of the day, three monks from a nearby temple.

"Isn't Monk Peace's turn today?" one of the monks asked the taller monk.

"He didn't show up," the taller one explained.

"That's strange, as he's never missed his shift," the shorter one responded.

As the tour began, many tourists stopped by the third cave for a break, but not Philip. He wanted to take in all the information to stop his mind wandering back to his bitter-sweet memory of his marriage.

When they got to the tenth cave, it was just Philip and the taller monk. The cave was dim but tranquil, with many paintings of Buddhas on the wall. There was a single splash of red paint on the ground. Philip approached for a better look and smelled blood! Laying there was a monk with his eyes wide open. "Look! Is that a body?" the monk screamed.

"Let me look." Philip, on the other hand, was as cool as a cucumber. Philip was thrilled that now he had a crime to solve.

Philip kneeled next to the corpse, observing the bruises on the neck without touching them. He knew better than to contaminate the crime scene. After an initial examination, Philip called for reinforcement. One of the police officers was Paul, who was twice as tall as his partner, Bill, who, on the other hand, was pretty short. Later, they found a wedding band inside the victim's pocket and a pair of broken glasses next to the body. However, none of them found any fingerprints or footprints.

"The suspect was so meticulous; he had cleared up the crime scene," Paul concluded.

Philip summarised, "We have four leads. First, considering these glasses are made of gold, we can deduce the suspect is rich. Second, the suspect suffers from myopia, considering the curves of the lenses. Third, none of these monks is responsible, as they can't get married. Finally, the suspect is either married or engaged."

"The monks have confirmed the identity of the body as Monk Peace," added the shorter officer.

"I know where the suspect might have bought this pair of glasses. These golden glasses are special items at Delta Optical," Phillip recalled.

"How can you be so sure that the murderer got it at Delta?" Paul inquired.

"Delta Optical specialises in manufacturing this type of eyewear," explained Philip.

“Sweet, let’s head to Delta Optical now,” Paul said in excitement. On the horsecar, Philip examined the wedding band closely and found it was from De Beers Jewellery, and the initials ‘M.T.’ were engraved on the inside of the ring.

“Interesting. M.T. Enterprise is the one financing the renewal of the Mogao Caves,” said the taller officer.

“Perhaps, we should visit the M.T. headquarters,” suggested Philip.

Arriving at Delta Optical, the officers began interviewing the shop attendant. “Please provide us a list of customers that have made an appointment for next week,” they asked.

“Why do you need it?” The shop attendant was curious.

“We think the suspect may come to this optical store next week to get a new pair of glasses,” the officers explained. And without much surprise, they found a Martin Torres booked an appointment for a new pair of glasses, same model, same configuration.

“Shall we head to the temple and see if we can find any connection between Monk Peace and our suspect Mr M?” Philip advised.

Later, they learnt that Monk Peace was an expert on the Immortal Buddha in particular. Yet, he had never revealed which of the thousand Buddhas was the Immortal Buddha for fear of theft. Just that an idea came to Philip.

On the next day, the announcement of “The Debut of the Immortal Buddha” went viral on major social media platforms. “A private tour of the Immortal Buddha will be given to the highest bidder,” the abbot announced.

In the morning of the private tour, Philip, the two officers and the abbot were waiting at the entrance of the Mogao Caves. Coming out of the private helicopter was none other than Martin Torres, the multibillionaire. Seeing the police officers, M.T. looked mortified but quickly regained his composure. “I’d not answer any question without the presence of my lawyer,” he requested.

When they arrived at the police station, Mr Torres told Philip and the officers that one day he overheard two monks at a bar talking about the Buddha of Immortality at the Mogao Caves. He was intrigued because he wanted to know the secret of living forever. He then approached Monk Peace alone and offered him a hundred thousand gold coins. Monk Peace, however, rejected the offer. The argument got heated, and he accidentally pushed Monk Peace against the stone wall, and that, he died.

After killing Monk Peace, Torres panicked. He had never killed a person before. So, learning from all the crime movies he had watched, he wiped off all his fingerprints with his tie and took off.

“Thanks for your honesty,” said the taller officer.

Philip silently left. His quest for love may have ended in divorce, and Torres's pursuit of immortality caused a death and a sentence. Philip was glad he could start over and genuinely prayed for Torres's soul to be redeemed.

# An Adventure to the Mogao Grottoes

*S.K.H. St. Peter's Primary School, Li, Chak Ping Ramsey – 10*

It was a moonlit night with a clear sky. As usual, I quickly fell into a sweet dream after saying good night to Mum.

I was flying freely and finally landed in an exotic place with foreign vibes. I found myself in an oasis city, enveloped by oceans of drifting sand. Just when I felt totally confused, I saw people in queer outfits walking towards me. I couldn't help but wonder where I was.

Then, I saw a monk. "Master, may I know where I am?" I asked. "Young benefactor, you must be foreign, aren't you? This is Dunhuang's Mingsha Mountain, a place where traders must pass. It's also called the Silk Road," the monk replied calmly. "What? This should be the Qin Dynasty. How come I've gone back in time?" I muttered anxiously, thinking about what I should do. Although I learned about Dunhuang in history books, being alone in this ancient desert was unimaginable and disturbing!

Just as I was baffled and flooded with anxiety, the monk comforted me, "My name is Le Zun, please don't panic. Look at the golden lining upon Mingsha Mountain. It must be the Buddha's appearance. The Bodhisattva shall bring you to wherever you wish to go, Amitabha!" After hearing his kind words, I felt more secure, but still I didn't know when I could return home.

That evening, Master Le Zun invited me to join him. I didn't know where to go, so I agreed. I told Master, "My name is Alvin. I live in the southern city of Hong Kong, and I come from 2022." I took a glance at Master, then I continued, "2022 is more than 2000 years from here. There are many skyscrapers and cars in Hong Kong..." To my surprise, Master didn't doubt what I told him; instead, he seemed to be fascinated, as if he had been to a place called Hong Kong before.

Suddenly, we heard roosters crowing – it was already dawn. The hostess of the family we were staying with prepared a piping hot breakfast for us. It reminded me of the delicious bacon omelette Mum always makes for me. I felt like crying and teared up.....

"Don't be sad, my young benefactor." Master Le Zun said. "I shall take you to Mingsha Mountain to chant sutras. The Bodhisattva will surely help when He hears your heartfelt words. Amitabha! Good indeed! Good indeed!"

Although not feeling entirely confident, I followed Master Le Zun to Mingsha Mountain. I could see mountains surrounded by clouds and thousands of golden rays, and I faintly saw an apsara with a light body and beautiful look. She had long ribbons flying with her freely in the sky, and the Flower of Luck in her hand drifted away with the wind. Then, one of its petals fell gently on my palm. Its fragrance gave me courage and strength. I felt that the God of Luck suddenly came to me. My heart trembled slightly, and some voices and words in Sanskrit quietly reached my ears. My intuition told me that these Sanskrit voices were revelations given by the Gods – a sacred mission given to me.

From then on, I temporarily let go of my family attachment and wholeheartedly helped Master Le Zun to beg alms. We also wrote copies of the Bodhisattva's wise words and distributed them to local families and business travellers, hoping to get everyone's help to dig the Buddhist caves.

After the news spread, many people donated money and helped us create the grottoes. First, artisans worked together to paint exquisite murals and make human figure frames with sturdy wooden branches. Then, we wrapped the frames in reeds, covered them with mud and painted colours on them. This was how we made the coloured sculptures before their paint dried, and we carefully put them into the grottoes.

Looking at what we had built, we all had a huge smile on our faces. However, when winter arrived, the weather became so unstable that it snowed for three days and nights straight. Many artisans were trapped in the grottoes and were frozen to death. When their families saw their frozen bodies, they wailed in grief. I also felt aggrieved and

deeply saddened. However, the dead artisans' open eyes expressed calmness and tranquillity, as if they were consoling their beloved ones, "Don't worry. We are just going to Heaven a few steps ahead."

Over time, we put grief aside and resumed our work. The artisans worked continuously, and days and years flew by. We went through a dozen long dynasties – Sui, Tang, Five Dynasties and so on. Every day I watched the sun rising from the east and setting to the west, while witnessing the completion of the largest cultural and historical treasure house.

"Wake up, Alvin. Going to be late for school!" I suddenly heard Mum's voice. I opened my tired eyes, and I could still vaguely see the coloured sculptures and murals on my ceiling. The dream was just too real to forget...

It was finally Christmas holiday. I surfed the Internet about the history of Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes, feeling genuinely interested like never before. For the first time, I carefully read the historical documents of the Mogao Grottoes. "Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes, the Thousand Buddha Grottoes, is located at the eastern foot of the Mingsha Mountain, 25 kilometres to the southeast of Dunhuang City in Gansu Province, China. It is a mecca of architecture, sculpture and painting altogether." I enjoyed the texts while reminiscing the unforgettable moments from the dream. Now it seemed even more intriguing and perplexing!

Afterwards, I asked Mum, "May we visit Dunhuang's Mogao Grottoes when the pandemic is over?" Mum looked at me doubtfully but quickly agreed, "Of course! I hope that one day I could visit the sacred city of Buddhism too." "Let's go then!" I proclaimed firmly, just like a well-studied archaeologist whose eyes were filled with anticipation to learn about ancient civilisations.

# Exploring the Ancient Temple

*School of the Nations, Jiang, Karen – 10*

Right after the school bell rang, Lily went to the library to meet with her partner for a project. She wanted to start the presentation right away! It was a group project assigned to her, although she was pretty smart, she didn't know what to write! So, she stared at her history book instead. There is an entire presentation about the Mogao Grottoes to fill out! Beside her sat her partner, Noah, who was puzzled. Noah is a boy that likes to draw. Nothing in the history book made sense to him, he looked up the location on the internet.

A few minutes later, Lily took a deep breath and finally said "Why don't we explore the Mogao Grottoes first?" Noah nodded in agreement.

The next day, Lily woke up extra early, she was very excited for the trip, Lily grabbed her phone "Hello? Is this Noah?" But there was no reply. *He must still be in bed*, thought Lily, *He's always late, he's even late for school! But I didn't think he would be late for this too, I should have predicted this!* Lily shook her head, she quickly packed her stuff up, and headed towards Noah's apartment. She knocked on the door. The door creaked as Noah slowly opened it.

"Why this early?" Noah asks with a yawn, "It's only 6:30!"

"I don't care, we are going right now!" Lily said. *It's not even that early!* She added in her mind.

Noah rubbed his eyes sleepily, "But I haven't eaten breakfast y—" He wanted to protest, but Lily interrupted him, she was ready for this! "No excuses! Take this sandwich as your breakfast." she said as she reached into her bag.

Lily stuffed an egg sandwich into Noah's mouth, grabbed Noah's hand and dragged him out. *Here we come, Mogao Grottoes!* She thought excitedly.

Walking to the Mogao Grottoes wasn't easy, in fact it was pretty far, only after a few minutes, Noah started to complain.

"It's been hours!" cried Noah,

"Be patient," said Lily.

"But I don't like walking, my foot hurts!" Noah complained.

Lily ignored him, and opened a map she bought yesterday. It was a map of the Mogao Grottoes.

"Wow..." Noah muttered under his breath, "How prepared are you?!"

A few minutes later, Noah was still complaining, Lily was so annoyed that she even started scolding him. Noah bent down after being scolded by Lily "I beg you!" He said, "Please let us take the bus!"

Lily sighed as she reached into her pocket. There was nothing, not even a single coin. Noah also realized he only had one coin, as he left the rest of his pocket money at home. One coin wasn't enough to pay for one person's bus ride! "I guess we have to walk all the way now. It's good exercise!" Lily shrugged as they walked down the street.

A few hours later, Noah and Lily finally reached their destination.

"The Mogao Grottoes..." Noah looked up, and exclaimed, "It's so tall! Taller than I expected!" Noah grabbed his sketchbook and sketched a couple pictures.

Lily stared at him "You've never seen it before?! Not even in photos?!" *That's weird, I thought he had seen them before*, Lily told herself.

"Why so surprised? I thought you knew!" Noah replied without even looking at her.

Lily just continued staring at him, "No, I never knew that. But, seriously, you haven't seen it before?" Lily frowned.

Noah just took a deep breath and walked in the Mogao Grottoes, "Come on, get over it!" he replied.

Lily raced after Noah, "Hey! Wait for me."

“Woah” gasps Noah, “So many Buddhas, I wonder who made these!”

Lily was curious so she stepped forward. She looked up, she felt a bit awkward. She had never seen this many Buddhas before! Lily looked beside her and realized that Noah had gone to the next room. Lily headed towards the next room, to catch up with Noah. The room was decorated with Buddhas, on the wall, and even on the ceiling.

“More Buddhas!” Lily said, looking surprised, so squeezed Noah’s hand, “Who has time to design all of these rooms?!”

Noah sneered, “I thought you saw it all in the pictures.”

Lily shook her head and didn’t even look at him, instead she stared at the walls, “So many details...” Lily admired the walls for a few more minutes, before walking into the next room, then another, and then another, until they had been through all of the rooms. It was all the same, decorated with Buddha pictures and some even had statues. Noah quickly sketched down what he saw, and Lily, she carefully examined the sculptures and art. “Wow!” Noah and Lily stared at each other “No wonder why our teacher wanted us to make a presentation of this ancient building,” Noah said. Lily nodded in agreement “The art and sculptures were amazing! All the textures, details... Just look at them!” Lily pointed at a nearby sculpture of Buddha.

After a bit more of examining and sketching, they decided to head back towards home by taking the same path. Lily noticed a little library nearby, and the two of them headed towards the library, hoping to get more information about the Mogao Grottoes. Luckily, for them, there were tons of books about the Mogao Grottoes in the library. They took their time reading and finding out more information about the Mogao Grottoes, “Look at this!” Noah showed Lily, it was an old book with tea colored pages, and the cover said ‘History of the Mogao Grottoes.’ Lily found a dusty old book with facts about the Mogao Grottoes.

Noah groaned “I can’t remember all of them!” Lily put her hand in her bag and took out two notebooks and two pencils, “Be glad that I came in prepared, unlike you!” Lily replied. Noah muttered something about being dragged, but Lily didn’t hear it, instead she focused on reading and taking notes. Hours and hours passed, by the time Lily and Noah finished their notes, the sun was setting.

Then Noah put the book back to its proper place and said, “I think I got enough information for our presentation. I think we’ve done enough exploring for today. Come on, let’s go work on our presentation, unless you want to get a low score?”

Noah took Lily’s hand and both of their notebooks and dragged her back home.

Lily grabbed her computer and began typing everything that was on their notes. Noah, thanks to his sketchbook, which he used to sketch a bunch of pictures, easily added the illustrations to the presentation. After a few days of hard work, the presentation was nearly done.

At the end of the week, Lily added some final touches to the presentation before submitting it.

“Good luck to the both of us!” Noah gives Lily a high five.

“I hope the visit was worthwhile.” Lily said.

“Oh, it definitely was.”

# The Curse of the Mogao Grottoes

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Chaudhury, Tanisha – 11*

On a quiet evening Ann, an eight-year-old girl, was in the dining room eating dinner with her family. She is a happy and dauntless little girl. Still safe and living a normal life, little did she know that she was not going to live very long. Rumors about a curse regarding the Mogao Grottoes that had been released in the ancient times (古时候) was spreading rapidly. It also had been rumored that on one unlucky day, the whole Human Race would be wiped out.

“爸爸你前去莫高窟么?” Ann asked her dad, but Ann’s dad didn’t respond.

The next day ,Ann’s mother started acting strange. It felt like she had been affected by the curse.

Even though Ann and her father were suspicious, they did not let their suspicions go far. How could Ann’s mom have the curse?

Or could she?

One midnight, appalling news regarding Ann’s cousin's disappearance came to her family and it came in a horrifying manner.

“小安你的表妹不见了!” exclaimed, Ann’s mother.

Tears flowed heavily down Ann's eyes. Her cousin was so close to her.

*The Mogao Grottoes caves are located in Dun hang, China. One night, Kang Kang was listening to the news with his parents about these mysterious caves. The news quoted, "The legend of the Mogao Grottoes is unfortunately true." One of the text scrolls a monk had written proved it. He had stated that thousands of bodies lying sacrificed in these caves have been found. The text scroll was ancient and frightening.*

*‘Today I found a little boy's body lying near the place where I held my prayers. I am a priest of this cave and have never seen anything like this before. It is mysterious and scary. The boy’s body was covered in blood, and when I turned around, my altar offerings were also covered in blood. When I looked down, I saw a trail of mysterious papyrus lying on the ground. I picked them up and followed them, at the end it brought me to a giant Buddha statue that I had never seen before. I knelt before him, I felt like it was radiating a power so strong I could feel it in the air. As I looked at him, I suddenly felt like I was about to die a peaceful and wonderful death as an offering to Buddha.’*

*That was the monk’s last word.*

*Many qualified researchers went and searched for the monk but found nothing.*

*Kang Kang was amazed, and he wanted to find these caves. At night when his parents were asleep, he ventured out, as he lived close to the caves of Dunhang. He rowed to the front of the cave. There he could see a hidden entrance and went inside. There were bodies in front of the giant statue. It was eyesore to the cave and made the*

*place creepier. But something didn't feel right, and nothing could have gotten more gruesome than what was going to happen to Kang Kang.*

*“我在哪儿？” whispered Kang Kang, he turned around and saw the statue radiating a glow.*

*The next second there was blood all over his body.*

*He knew death was near. His parents had once told him death is just a next great adventure and there is nothing to fear about it. The thing that you should fear is life, life is the most horrible yet fascinating thing, you never knew what was going to happen.*

*Before his final breath, his body fell motionless on the ground and he looked around peacefully.*

*The statue's eyes were the blank. Its face was not scarred with the single bit of emotion instead it was blank and expressionless. It had the same gravely look of respect in its eyes and though it was immobile, it felt like it was moving around the room. There was a sudden movement and in an instant the sound of a body falling hit the ground. Kang Kang lay immobile under the cave. Blood was gushing out of him on the altar and there was a pool of blood underneath.*

*“妈妈您去哪儿了？” screamed Ann at seven in the morning.*

That dull day, Ann's mother's disappearance was reported to the police and the police did their hardest to find her, yet there was no luck. When the news came out to the public it was obvious—everyone was being lured to the Mogao Grottoes.

That day while Ann and her dad were watching the news, it was reported that everywhere people were disappearing.

The next day ,Ann and her father disappeared.

The aftereffects of the curse were seriously escalating, and there was nothing anyone can do about it. They had to go in the cave and retrieve the bodies of their dead loved ones.

Was it the end of humanity? Would the million-year-old curse kill everyone? Did people expect the statue would give up on his revenge of what was committed millions of years ago?

# The Little Monk in Mogao Cave 220

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Hsueh, Weiyo – 11*

It was in 1994 when the three men found a mysterious cave located at the eastern foot of Mingsha Mountain. It was on the west bank of Daquan River, facing the Sanwei Mountain in the east, 25 km away from Dunhuang. A perfect location for making cave temples, it is now called the Mogao Grottoes. Paul Pelliot had wanted to explore the Mogao Grottoes in his life, and the first cave he unlocked was named 220.

---

Horse hooves trotted across the desert, leaving prints on the sand of the rocky barren. Three men that had leather bags on their backs marched towards the caves. Small rocks landed on the boy's head whilst he held the basket of herbs in his hand. Scars ripped open on his feet from walking on the rough rocks. Blisters formed by scrubbing the bare floor with damp cloth. His hands felt weak as he pulled the rope for the well. He didn't mind. He had just become an apprentice and was ready to learn from his master. The little monk didn't have a name; he was an orphan taken in sanctuary by the monks. His only purpose in life: to help his master.

Color danced in the little monk's eyes as the master drew on the wall, creating a picture of two celestials flying on the sky. It was like a living being, the art. The little monk loved it, especially when his master told him to mix the paint. To create the paint, he had to collect herbs from the nearby hills or mountains. Plants were very hard to find in the desert. Although the little monk had to travel very far to receive one type of flower or root, he still loved it.

That night, under the sickly light of the oil lamp, the little monk saw his master painting on the wall. It was a goddess in the position of flying. After sleeping, the little monk woke up on the floor to see a lively piece of art in front of him.

Turquoise dresses floated along with the movements of the two apsaras. Many other deities stood on the bottom of the massive wall, bodies curved, as if in awe of the goddesses flying. Another goddess had risen to her feet, shape as lifelike as a real human. The little monk opened his eyes wide with curiosity at the painting. He wished it were real.

---

One day, the little monk's master asked him to collect a special herb. "It helps the painting stay longer on the walls rather than rotting under the wind and dust," his master mentioned to him. The mission became important. It was going to be a long road due to the plant living in special environments, so the little monk would have to climb to the top of Mingsha Mountain in order to receive the herb.

The first few days were calm and steady when the little monk went up the base of the mountain, but the weather got worse. Sand poured into his eyes whenever he tried to open them just a tiny crack. Nothing could be seen in view, but the little monk didn't give up. A flaming hope had ignited in him. He wished to look at the painting on the wall when his master finished the final layer coated on.

The little monk's energy was dwindling and he felt like collapsing when he saw the herb he was meant to retrieve in the sandstorm. The herb's strong roots held it firmly to the ground. He wasted half his energy pulling the plant from the ground.

It had been a few days since the little monk had found a place to rest and sleep. He was extremely tired and stiff. He knew for a second, he was going to perish in the foolish pursuit of finding his way back to the caves in the middle of a sandstorm. The little monk pushed that thought away from his mind and continued for more flowers. Three days had passed, and a cave appeared in front of the little monk. He felt overjoyed. He could almost see the painting shared amongst the other monks coming to the Mogao Grottoes and the smile of the goddess.....

A light shone, filling the small cave with color, blinding the little monk momentarily. The goddesses came alive! Music floated along the painting's streets, sunlight danced into the little monk's fingers and the turquoise-dressed goddess reached out a hand, as if pulling him to heaven.

# The Battle at Dunhuang

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Lee, Christopher – 11*

All this suffering of my people...my country...all because of oil. These last words from the men on the battlefield...their bodies are never coming home. They didn't even have a proper burial. It is time we took a stand. It is time to speak up. It is time for an assault. We are taking vengeance to our unfortunate brothers who were slaughtered... Let's annihilate the giant blocking our path to greatness.

"Hey you, what's your name?" It's the commando. I hated that guy. But it was fear. I replied, "It is Din-Shank, sir," in the best voice I could. It was hard, especially since I was trembling in fear at the same time.

"Din-Shank, huh. I've got a position for you."

I gasped. In my mind I was hoping for a squadron leader. But the words that came out of him were "messenger."

Han-Song, my best buddy, snickered. Everyone knew the messenger was the worst. You had to watch your brothers die in your arms and record them down.

"I've been watching you during the artillery. You seem to be a good chatter."

I have no idea what he was up to.

"Well, I think you seem to be a good at chatting and writing down the following events while your fellow brothers die."

"No sir, that would not be a pleasure."

"Too bad someone has to do it." Han-Song laughs once again.

"Messenger, eh? Ha, messengers... so cruel... some people even say worse than being in the midst of war... just standing there... watching people you have been with getting massacred." I remain speechless as the others laugh.

The next morning, we started a jog, a jog like no other. It seemed forever, but we stopped when we heard something. We crept up a hill and see Chinese troops.

"What the heck are Chinese troops doing in Mongolia?" We check the map. We didn't have any idea where we were. But it turns out, we're in China, in the city of Dunhuang. We had to retreat immediately.

It was too late. Chinese troops chased after us as we ran. We ran into a nearby cave. Because it was so dark, we couldn't see a thing. Suddenly, it felt weird. We lit up a flashlight, and there was something that really stood out. Pillars on both sides had drawings of little figures on them, as in the middle, stood a giant statue standing around 20-30 feet tall. I gazed up at the monument as we stare in amazement.

When one of the men were about to move, the commando stopped him. He said that if he moved, all of us would be speaking Chinese. We heard footsteps everywhere, as if the mini figures on the wall moved.

Suddenly, the footsteps got nearer and nearer. Han-Song pulled a grenade and rolled it toward the entrance.

"No!" the commando exclaimed. We grabbed our M16s and opened fire in any direction possible, ruining much of the perfect wall. It seemed like the opposing side were doing the same.

Instantaneously, I heard a cry, "Arrg, help!" It was my best buddy Han-Song. He was struggling between the pillars of life and death. I hurried over to help him, but it was too late. He was shot in the arm and the leg. When I got there, his last words were, "One last thing, I want those men on the other sides to join me."

I cried in despair. Since I knew we weren't going back to Ulaan Baatar anymore, there as no point of living. I pulled the pin of a grenade and sprinted for the cave entrance.

5

Suddenly, a million childhood memories started to come back to me. Mama and Papa buying me ice cream...it all revolved around my family, like something was up. It was like a million butterflies flying around me, but I couldn't catch a single one of them.

4

This is it. Now or never.

3

★Gunshots★ "Gettem!" yelled a Chinese soldier. "He's going to destroy the Mogao Caves!"

2

"Shut up, you little nauseous twit"

1

"For my country."

# The Battle at Dunhang

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Li, Wei Han – 9*

In the year AD 750 during the Song Dynasty, deep in northwest China there was a city called Dunhuang, which has a beautiful oasis to the south of the city with a famous lake called the Crescent Lake. The lake normally has a depth of seven and half meters, but one day, it suddenly dried up, and the local population only had about two weeks of water left. The chief monk Sanzang of the monastery near the Mogao caves ordered a relay of fire signals to be sent back to the capital city of Chang'an. At the time, the emperor Xuanzong learned of this news and immediately sent his top agent named Phoenix to investigate and help the people. Agent Phoenix quickly prepared his equipment, food supply, and five crew members and hopped onto an imperial airship able to travel anywhere in the middle kingdom within five days. He sat in the cockpit and set off towards Dunhuang. On the way, one crew member curiously asked, "Why is this place called Mogao caves?" Phoenix replied, "Mogao means peerless, and you will know why when you see it for yourself."

Within three days, Phoenix and his crew landed on a sandy cliff near the monastery. The crew member excitedly remarked, "Wow! The Mogao caves really is peerless! It is so tall and long, and it has so many beautiful artworks and sculptures from the past!" They were greeted by Sanzang, who told them that the sacred Dunhuang Star Chart had mysteriously gone missing. Phoenix told Sanzang to take them to the location of the Star Chart, which was in Cave 17. Cave 17 has a secret chamber which stored the most sacred scrolls. Phoenix went inside to check for any clues left by the thief. He looked at the floor and found footprints leading to the other side of the room. As the trail finally met the rocky walls, the footsteps also appeared on the walls. Phoenix thought, "I'm pretty sure that he climbed over the walls and onto the roof....and escaped!" Phoenix and the crew went outside of the cave and onto the desert, he noticed that the footsteps continued on so far into the horizon until he cannot see it anymore. Sanzang told Phoenix that he believes that the missing Star Chart is affecting the water in Crescent Lake, so the Star Chart must be found before the towns people start to dehydrate!

Phoenix and his crew boarded the airship. A crew member said to the monks, "Don't worry, my friends! We are going to get the Star Chart back in no time!" They flew for half a day in the southwest direction into the Gobi desert and arrived at a strange, hidden city that was not marked on the map. Phoenix explored the city and went from door to door to ask if anyone has seen the Star Chart. At last, they found an old man who gave them clues. The old man said, "I saw a tiny man holding a scroll with a Star seal walking towards that house over there last night." Phoenix and his crew ran towards the house and found there was a tiny man studying the Star Chart on a table in the middle of the room. Phoenix asked the thief "Hey you! Why did you steal this sacred scroll from the Mogao caves?" The man calmly introduced himself, "My name is Wang Ping. I am poor, and I do not have food to eat. One day, a mysterious man from the West promised to feed me if I can steal this Star Chart for him. He chose me because of my size. Only I can fit through cracks in the walls to reach the secret chamber in Cave 17." Then, Phoenix's crew member said "Give it back! We need it for the townspeople to survive!" Phoenix explained that the moment the Star Chart went missing, all the wells and water in Crescent Lake dried up; it is a curse of the Mogao caves if the Star Chart is not returned to where it belongs.

Before Phoenix finished explaining, Wang Ping snatched the Star Chart and tried to escape. He jumped out the window onto a narrow road. He kicked the side of a wall along the road and the whole wall came crumbling down. Phoenix and one of his crew got over the rubble, but three of the crew members were badly injured. Wang Ping kept running, saw the parked airship, and ran inside it. Phoenix was right on his tail, and there was no escape for Wang Ping. Phoenix and the crew member barged in and locked the door tight. Phoenix snatched the sacred scroll from Wang Ping's hand and tied him up. Phoenix said, "I'm sorry Wang, but you did not listen, so we have to tie you up."

Phoenix and his crew flew back to the Mogao caves. They heard everyone cheering as they landed. Wang apologized to the townspeople, "I am so sorry for stealing your precious Star Chart and causing so much trouble." Sanzang was very forgiving and said, "It is ok, but make sure not to steal anything again, ok?" Wang nodded. Sanzang decided to invite Wang to live in the monastery with them so he can have food and learn to be a good person. As Phoenix placed the map back into the secret chamber of Cave 17, Crescent Lake magically filled up on its own. Now that he has done his job, Phoenix and crew returned home to report the success to the emperor.

Crescent Lake and the townspeople remained happy and well-hydrated for over a thousand years until one day when Wang's descendant, abbot Wang Yuanlu, crossed paths with a gentleman named Sir Aurel Stein at the Mogao caves in the early 1900s, and once more, the Star Chart was removed from its resting place. But that is a story for another time.

# The Mogao Malice

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Sinha, Niharika – 11*

“The Mogao Grottoes, finally we have arrived!” Malena exclaims, looking at the huge front temple. It was Chinese style with seven balconies poking out of the smooth rocky hill. The first floor was the only one with doors. As they went through, the sight amazed Malena. All along the walls there were carvings and paintings. There were probably thousands of statues carved out of the walls. There were many temples on the ground. The place was so big you could get lost in seconds.

“It has been years, since I last came here,” Jason said, looking out to a beautiful sculpture on the wall.

“Can’t believe you went to this beautiful place without me,” Malena whined, looking all around.

“You weren’t born yet!” Jason argued.

“Hello!” A strange-looking man appeared from behind one of the many beautiful temples. He was tall, with freckles dusting the bridge of his nose dotting all the way to his cheeks. Messy, dark hair lingered right above his black mysterious eyes. He was wearing a hunter uniform. He had a long stream of bandages carefully wrapped around his hand.

“My name is Feng. You can call me Will, and I will be your tour guide for today,” he motioned for them to follow.

They followed him, chattering happily. As they visited lots of temples, it started to get dark. When they were about to finish off, Maybelle couldn’t help but be drawn to a particular room.

“What about that one?” Maybelle pointed at a dark room.

“I don’t think we should,” Will stuttered.

“Why not?” Malena asked.

“Well—yo—you see th—that room is haunted.”

“How?”

“Mmm—hmm,” Jason pushed him aside and opened the door.

“No, don’t go in there!” he shouted as they entered.

“Woah, it sure is dark in here” Jason stated, lighting a match.

“Hey, I see something. Over there in the corner!” Malena yelled, pacing towards it.

It was a glass cover that had been broken through the middle. Shattered pieces of glass were inside. Blood peeked through some of the glass shards. A torn piece of silk purple cloth dangled from one of the edges on the cover. Whatever was inside it was gone, and all that was left was empty clues. Fear rushed over them. The siblings raced out of the room.

“Quick, call the police” Malena screamed pointing at the room.

“Wh—what?” Will was trembling.

With a shaky hand, he pulled out his phone and typed in the number. Soon the police arrived.

“I am officer Shu. You will have to stay in this area until this case is solved” Officer Shu said

“We can’t stay here long as our college starts soon.” Malena said

“She’s right. Please let us help with the investigation, it will speed things up.” Maybelle pleaded

“Fine, but I don’t know how a bunch of kids will help.” the officer grumbled. The next day morning they set off to check the site.

"It seems to be someone has smashed the glass." Jason told.

"And the culprit cannot be from outside since security would have stopped them." Maybelle said.

"Why don't we ask the security who was here the night before?" Malena said. They all walked towards security.

"Hello Mr....." Maybelle trailed off.

"Wang Lei" the guard replied.

"Mr. Wang Lei, may I ask you some questions?"

"Fire away." Wang Lei answered.

"Do you happen to know who was on guard the night before yesterday?" Maybelle asked.

"That would be me"

"Do you remember who was here on that night?"

"Let me see, the manager was here having a late-night check. Bolin was here on guard with me, and Will and another tour guide were helping the manager checking the artifacts in this area. Oh, and before I forget, I heard glass breaking. When I came back the manager told me it was nothing to worry about."

"Thanks." The three walked away.

"I'm telling you Maybelle. It's Will." complained Malena.

"Just look at the signs, the glass has blood on it and will has an injured hand. Plus, he was the one telling us not to go in." Jason backed her up.

"I know, but I still don't think it's him" Maybelle answered walking away. The next day morning Maybelle woke up early to question all the people. She started with the manager of the area.

"Where were you the night of the theft."

"I was doing my regular late-night check. I decided to bring Will and Antony along for a look around since they were new. Bolin was sleeping, as usual, but Wang Lei was on duty outside that temple. We went towards my office, they waited outside as I went to grab my keys. When I got there, I heard a crash I came outside and saw Bolin outside my office surrounded by broken glass. He had only broken a vase. I went back and saw Wang Lei worrying. I told him that there was nothing to worry about."

She went from the manager to Bolin, he said that he was sleeping the whole time until Jones woke him up to tell him to get some water. When he went in the office, he was so tired he accidentally knocked down the vase.

Then she interrogated both Will and Antony they said they were waiting outside the office like they were told few hundred meters away from the temple. They had also heard a crash from inside right after they saw Bolin walk in, they were worried so they went in to see Bolin had knocked down a vase.

Later that day Maybelle had called everyone to tell them that she had solved the case.

"Everyone listen up the culprit is none other than.... Wang Lei!"

"What? Impossible!" The manager screamed.

"Listen first, Wang Lei was the only one there at the temple when all of you were at the manager's office. Wang Lei heard a crash, but it happened at the manager's office hundred meters away. How could he hear that? Unless he was trying to frame someone else. He noticed Will had a bandage, so he used that to his advantage and broke the glass when no one was there. The only reason Will was telling us not to go in there was because he did not learn about that temple so he would not know what to talk about in there. Instead of telling us and making him look like a newbie he told us a lie to cover up." Maybelle finished, panting.

# The Mogao Caves' Thrilling Secret

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Somireddy, Sahasra – 9*

"I woke up looking as tired as a zombie and checked my calendar. To my surprise today was the day me and my friend, Katy, were going to the Mogao Grottoes to explore the caves!" I dashed to the bathroom and brushed my teeth with joy and headed downstairs and started packing for my adventurous trip.

Soon I was standing in front of Katy's front yard. Then, I saw Katy with her suitcase. We took an Uber and in about three hours we reached the entrance. We got off the Uber and saw the massive gate. I touched the cold metallic bars and opened the gate, everything there was an amazing sight. People exploring caves, Mogao Grottoes themed comics, history of the Mogao Grottoes and many other amazing sights. We went to our hotel to the fifth floor and sat down to relax.

The television was as huge as an elephant, bathrooms, bedrooms, kitchens all seemed very tidy and clean. "What a luxury hotel! The next day at seven o'clock, I went to the bathroom, brushed my teeth, took a shower, and wore my clothes. I jumped up and down the stairs and saw Katy ordering food for us. We scarfed our food with creamy melted cheese on top and gave a loud burp.

Later, we strolled down the Mogao Caves exploring them one by one. Our next goal was to explore the Buddha Temple to inspect the ancient times of what the Mogao Grottoes history was like. I walked with Katy looking for a tall Cave with moss growing on it. We looked for about five minutes until we saw a tall, mossy cave. It smelled stinky and I could hear loud banging sounds inside there. It was very strange.

We slowly took a step or two and there was a loud thud behind my back. I turned around to see what happened and then I saw that the heavy door was closed. By this point, Katy was almost ready to faint.

I looked ahead in front of the pathway. No light, complete darkness. Now Katy and I were shivering. With nothing else to do I stepped forward hoping there was a way out of this mess. I also discovered that every step you take a lantern lights up. We finally came to the end of the pathway and to my surprise there was a tall monument of Lord Buddha with other statues surrounding it. To me, all those statues look incredibly old, smelly, disgusting, and moldy.

We stared at the statues for an extended period. Then, I heard the most thrilling, unbelievable, shocking news ever! The monument said in a raspy voice, "Hey kids stop staring at me like useless pigs." You, that little redheads need to get me a bucket of water or you are going to be cursed."

We were so shocked in amazement that the statue could speak. I whispered to Katy to not follow any of its commands, and she agreed with me. "NOW!" said the monument. Katy wanted to escape so she thought of an escape plan and whispered in my ear to ask the monument if we could go to the bathroom so that this crazy situation would end.

I disagreed to her plan and said, "Katy this is nearly the worst idea ever. "What if we get caught and can't escape?" But Katy was not listening. In fact, she said, "May we please go to the bathroom, it's important?" The Buddha eyed us suspiciously at first and then he told us to come back in a minute. Then, Katy just grabbed my hand and ran to the entrance. "Wow!" Katy is a cheetah!

By the second we saw sunlight we leaped in the air and pranced with joy. We searched for hungry tigers looking for their prey. Luckily, I spotted our hotel and we entered it and packed our suitcases.

We were headed home!

# The Tale of the Last Man

*Shanghai Singapore International School, Srivastava, Aanandi Jambholkar – 11*

According to the legend, the Mogao Grottoes were created in 366 AD by Le Zun, a Buddhist monk. It was said that Le Zun had a vision of a thousand Buddhas, leading to the creation of the Mogao Grottoes. As told by the most ancient storytellers, and most rumours that I heard, Le Zun created those caves to hide his treasures. People speak of gold, diamond, rubies, emeralds and various other precious jewels and riches that no one has ever seen before. But my job, as a storyteller, is not to describe these fabled treasures, but to retell the tale of the last man.

When Le Zun first decided that the caves were safe enough to store his treasures, he told two other men. The two people he trusted the most. Although he trusted them both, he had confidence in one of them, and that man would take care of the treasures, and find them after he died.

Now, that very man, said to be called Jing Li, was setting off to find his friend Le Zun's treasures, as Le Zun had died a few weeks ago. Jing Li reached the caves quicker than expected, as Le Zun had given him a map all those years ago. As he looked inside the caves, he hastily lit his lamp, and started carefully treading inside. But then, a voice said inside him, "There will be traps. Do not put your feet on any squares, and hurry up." He had been remembering exactly what Le Zun's instructions were. Taking out his ruler from his knapsack, he measured the tiles laid on the floor in front of him; they were rectangles. He sighed with relief.

Guided by his lamp, Jing Li walked on the dark, musty path inside the cave. There were cobwebs at almost every corner, and it was obvious no one had visited those caves for a very long time. Squinting into the distance, he saw a slab on the wall. Walking hurriedly towards it, Jing Li saw some illegible words. After removing all the moss on the slab, he held his lamp in front of the slab. It said:

"Which Buddha can listen to your tale? Tell it your story."

—Le Zun

Jing Li was puzzled. There were countless Buddhas, and what did his friend mean by 'listen'? He sat down on the floor. But before thinking any longer, his eyes began to droop, and his body was aching. Clearly, he needed rest. Laying down his warm rug, Jing Li resolved to sleep on it and decide what to do the next day.

The next morning, sunlight danced through the cracks in the wall, and Jing Li woke up. He had dreamed about an old Chinese tale he had heard from his grandmother. It was about how a king wanted a new minister, and had spread word around for those who wanted to attempt the test he would set for them. One day, a young man came to the king. "Ah, young man. Tell me, which doll can listen to your tale?" asked the king. There were three dolls in front of him, each identical to the other. The young man asked for a piece of straw. In the first one, he poked the straw through its ears, and it came out through its mouth. That meant this doll could not keep a secret. The second one, the straw went through one ear and came out the other. Still, not. The third one, the straw was stuck inside, it never came out. "Sire, it is the third doll." He was the new minister.

Also, Jing Li remembered that his friend, Le Zun, had told him to carry the biography he had written before he died. Jing Li quickly opened his knapsack and flipped the pages in the book to see if he could find what he wanted. He found it. On pages 50 – 54 was the tale of the three dolls. Jing Li at once knew what he had to do. He counted the Buddhas. "1, 2, 3, 4, ...49, 50," he counted out loud. He didn't have a piece of straw, but he did have a toothpick for picking his teeth. Taking it out, he poked it through its ear. It came out the other ear. He tried the 51<sup>st</sup> one, and the straw came out the mouth. He tried the 52<sup>nd</sup> one, and it stuck. He poked a little more to make sure, and a roll of paper shot out the other ear. He opened the paper. It was empty, but a small key fell out.

Keeping the key in his pocket of his robe, Jing Li walked for miles ahead, looking for some kind of door or chest. After walking for at least an hour, he found a door. Exhausted, he fitted the key into the door. *Click!* He pushed open the door with a creak. There was a passage of stairs going down. His lamp always in front of him, he slowly but steadily walked down. *Slam!* The door shut behind him. He jumped and almost lost his balance. After reaching the

bottom of the stairs, his lamp run out. He jumped across, as there might be traps in the dark. But there was something quite different.

His eyes almost fell out. Le Zun's treasures were not jewels, but it was a diamond mine. There was light gleaming on diamonds the size of eggs, the blue light reflected everywhere creating a rather overwhelming effect. Jing Li hurried back towards the stairs. But, earlier he had jumped over the tile right after the stairs. But this time he didn't. The tile was a square. Putting his feet on it, an icicle made of rock fell from the top and crushed him to death. Jing Li failed, and Le Zun's treasure has yet to be found.

"If I fail, I try again, and again, and again."

– Nick Vujicic

# Mystery

*Shrewsbury International School, Chan, Man Cheuk – 10*

More than one millennium ago, there was a curious boy called Bob. He went to an ancient cave in a desert. Inside the ancient cave, there were thousands and thousands of magnificent pictures, glorious statues and some timeworn scrolls. As soon as he took his first step to found out more, he heard something from the ground. “Oh, no!” he muttered before it exploded. “Help!” he shouted and was gone. He woke with a start. “Oh, my!” he sighed. “There must be a treasured cave there,” he said to himself.

Immediately, he fell out of his cozy bed. Then, he paddled the aged raft and reached the dusty caves.

Up the stairs he climbed, reaching his destination – Mogao caves.

“Wow! What a marvelous roof!” he whispered to himself. He looked up and saw a gigantic picture of Buddha. He focused at the ceiling. Suddenly, he was shifted to the pictures! At first, he didn’t know where he was. Confusedly, he asked an age-old man. “Where am I? What sort of place is this?” “Oh!” old man stopped in his tracks. “This is a place of Mystery!”

At the same moment when Bob disappeared, a goldfish which acted like a human saw it! “If the boy can disappear into the picture, then I can do it too!” Suddenly, it got a brilliant plan. So, it stared at the magnificent, multicolored ceiling. Nothing happened. Soon, it laid there furiously! “Instead of staring, I am gonna charge!” it thought. Immediately, it pounded rapidly, away from its corridor. Then, it leaped as high as a glider could glide! And...smashed!

“YAAA!!” screamed Bob as a giant, silvery goldfish crashed into the scene. “Woo! Cool! A big goldfish!” Suddenly, something beeped and a red, incandescent light blinked next to his foot. He looked down, but before he could see it, he vanished from the picture! Quickly, he stared around. Everything seemed distinct. Walls were brighter and statues looked brand-new too. Tons of people flooded into the cave. But their clothes were different, they looked like robes. Bob asked a young boy, “Is it 2021? Are those clothes ...” “No, silly. It’s Tang Dynasty!” interrupted the boy. “WHAAT?!!?” screamed Bob, saliva flying everywhere. He gasped with a sigh.

While Bob was rushing, two jetpacks bumped along with his foot irritatingly. They picked them up and wore them. Bob accidentally pressed a vast, red button. In a short time, jets of gas blasted from their jetpacks, lifting them high above the floor. “YAAAA...” they went, crashing into a cloud.

Bob pointed to an indigo star while the goldfish spotted an UFO as it zoomed away. However, they were closed to a BLACK HOLE! “NOOO...” they both cried as they zipped through it. Weirdly, they found themselves transported to the future, 1,000 years after Tang Dynasty. “...OOO!!!” they continued, plummeting towards Earth.

As they landed safely near Mogao caves, they discovered that all people were complaining. One exclaimed, “The spirits chased my child!” The others were blabbering about how creepy the cave was when a shadow loomed over them. “AAAH! The God spirits! Run!” someone screamed, speeding away with the others. Meanwhile, some children destroyed mural arts secretly. They smeared paint on the drawings bit by bit. They farted as putrid as a skunk’s fart while they were worshipping too. Soon, all the humans went away.

Years passed, only four men were left behind. One spoke, “Who will be the guard?” No one said a word, except Bob replied, “Me.” The last party waved goodbye and settled home.

At 1900, Bob was still guarding the cave with his humongous, chummy goldfish. Out of nowhere, a cheerful man from England appeared and Bob showed him everything awesome. On the other day, Bob stumbled around trying to control his headache but fell on the ground, dead as a door nail. The goldfish instantly cried it’s head off. After crying for few days, the cute goldfish finally settled down and built a grave for Bob. At the same time, a thief who forgot to be evil, stopped by to burn an incense stick.

The thief scrutinized the caves. “Ooh! What an awe-inspiring looking cave!” he thought. “Oh, I’ll kill and everything mine!” went his brain. He wondered for a moment, then he said, “Do you want a cookie? It’s delicious!” “No, I’m too old for cookies.” Replied the goldfish. The thief was heated. His first plan failed. At once, a fabulous trap struck his evil, mad mind. He leaded the goldfish to numerous, devastating mousetraps. Cautiously, he stepped between all the mousetraps to the other side. However, goldfish managed to reach the other side by its snow shovel!

The thief was getting more enraged. Now, he was as exasperated as a cheetah being trained how to dance. All of a sudden, he shouted, "I'm done with you! I'm gonna kill!" He took out his extremely hard, electrical chainsaw and an immensely sharp sword, chasing the cute goldfish with his maximum speed. Goldfish flung its tail, just in time to let the thief bumped into a rock. "YEEOUUUCH!!" hollered the thief in pain. Goldfish raced into a cave labelled 'Computer Room'. The thief was so furious that he stomped in frustration. A helicopter lowered a cloning machine onto the ground.

Back at the cave, goldfish hacked the cloning machine. After deleting few useful codes from the machine, hacking was done. Outside the cave, thief typed 'ARMY' but no thousands of himself appeared. Instead, an army of mosquitoes came out. "NOOOO!!" screamed the thief as dozens of immense mosquitoes poked his butt. "YEEOOOOUCH!!!" cried the painful thief as an immeasurable mosquito pined his head. He stumbled around, trying to control his headache, although he couldn't. He fell on the ground, knocked out cold.

"Phew!" Goldfish sighed in relief.

"Zzzz...Zzzz...Zzzz..." I went as I slept on my bed. I woke up after few hours, realizing that it was a dream. I yawned and set to work, writing this story in your hands.

# The Grotto Spirits

*Shrewsbury International School, Fernor, Annabel – 9*

I guess you could say that it all started when I became an orphan. Or when living in that silly orphanage got just that bit too much to handle. So I ran away. Well, more like floated. Floated away, far away, in a boat, ending up in China. I was only five when I wound up on the streets, near the Mogao Grottoes, living as a British street urchin in a Chinese world. But, bit by bit, I taught myself the language, and, bit by bit, China felt more like a home. And so, I started to explore.

It's not my fault I'm so curious. I just am. And the Grottoes, they just... stole me, I guess. At seven years old, I started creeping inside, marvelling at the statues inside. I would find the best painting, or statue, and imagine that I was the first one to have discovered it, thinking up an explorer name, like, 'Daisy the Discoverer,' and pretending to have won a medal. It became a daily routine. Every night for five years I visited the cave until I made the discovery to end all discoveries. And this time, I really was the first.

When I was twelve, I found a new route through the Grottoes. It led to a statue bigger than anything I've ever seen, and trust me, I'd seen everything. On the floor, there were many stone tiles, each with a zodiac animal on it. And, in the statue's lap, was a large jade box, with a dragon carved into the top. I let out a breath I didn't realise I'd been holding, walked across the room, and made what was probably the biggest mistake of my life. I opened the box.

They all flew out at once. The rat, monkey, sheep, tiger, rabbit, horse, ox, pig, snake, rooster, dog and dragon. Each one was like a ghost, blue and almost see through. Occasionally, one would change colour, shrink or grow in size, and the room was filled with the sound of shrieking and roaring forcing me to hide behind the rocks around the room. I covered my ears. I tried to think, but the deafening noise muffled the sound of thought in my head. Stay calm, I told myself, stay calm and you'll be ok. But I doubted that. And then I had a brilliant idea.

If the spirits could shrink, then could I trick them into shrinking so small, I could trap them in my hands? I decided it would be worth a try. I stuck my fingers into my mouth and whistled, stepping out from behind the stone I shouted at the spirits, "If you want to be the greatest, then you prove to me you have the power to shrink." One by one, the spirits shrank – but not enough to fit them into my hands. "You call that shrinking?", I asked, and slowly but surely the spirits shrank further until they were the size of a pea. "Let me inspect you", I said, "I can't quite see you from here." They floated forwards. Quick as a flash, I caught them, clenching my hands around them.

They wriggled a bit, then stopped. Back into the box they went, the lid firmly locked. I crept back out of the room, and blocked it off with a few rocks, just to make sure the spirits weren't let out again – then I ran away. After that, I was quite done with exploring, thank you very much. And, as far as I know, the spirits were never found again.

# Traveller Tito and the Mysterious Mogao Cave

*Shrewsbury International School, Kim, Tito – 9*

On a Sunday morning, Tito, the famous traveler, walked through the desert to go to the MOGAO cave. Tito thought that he would find the MOGAO cave in a couple hours. However, he was wrong. It took days and days for him to find the MOGAO cave. The water he brought was getting empty and he thought he would not have enough water and die. After suffering for 100 days, Tito finally found the extremely GIAGANTIC cave. He did not care if the cave was the MOGAO cave or not. He ran and tried to find water. After drinking 100 liter of water Tito felt alive.

Now he looked around the cave, he saw the enormous statues, and the paintings inside the cave. He was 100% sure that it is the MOGAO cave. Nobody knows when the MOGAO cave was built and Tito wants to study about the beauty of the MOGAO cave. He enjoyed being alone in darkness. He liked the silence of the cave and the size of the cave. Not only that, he fell in love with the colorful paintings and the enormous statues.

After sleeping inside the cave, Tito started a brand-new day to travel inside the cave. While going inside the cave Tito was worried about getting lost. So Tito marked the cave with a red crayon to remember the way of the cave. When going inside MAGAO cave, Tito felt weird. He saw a mysterious fire marks inside the cave. Tito was worried of a monster living inside the MAGAO cave, but also he was sure that it is impossible to have a monster inside the MAGAO cave. After looking carefully of the fire mark he laughed out loud. He found out that the fire marks were actually the red marker which Tito drew in order to prevent from getting lost inside the cave.

Walking inside the cave, Tito saw a small spider. He first thought the spider was cute. But after he picked up the spider, he got bitten and the spider got bigger. Tito laughed and became crazy. Suddenly, Tito's finger got itchy and slowly felt pain. Tito vomited and became dizzy. He fell down to the ground and fainted. After hours of time passed, Tito woke up, but he felt different than usual. When he saw his hand, he was shocked. His hand actually looked like a spider hand. He could not believe it. He fainted again.

After waking up, he saw a person in front of him. He asked for help, but the person did not answer but started to laugh. The person said that he is the spider Tito picked up. He said that the person who gets bitten by a spider changes to a spider while the spider becomes human. Tito was angry, and he tried to bite the person but the person ran away. Tito had no hope but to live as a spider inside the MOGAO cave.

After 100 years later, a new traveler came to the MOGAO cave. And the traveler met Tito, the spider. Tito thought it will be his last chance to become human again. He bite the traveler and ran away. Tito felt happy. After 100 years he became human again and ran away from the MOGAO cave. The world has changed a lot, and Tito did not know what to do.

# The Adventures of Monk Zhao

*Shrewsbury International School, Lai, Ashton – 10*

It was a tranquil morning in the town of Kai Chang, Monk Zhao was preparing to embark on a dangerous journey to save his beloved monastery, his home of thirty years from destruction. His mission was to retrieve the lost treasures hidden in the Mogao caves to save it. Legends told of a mysterious golden box filled with priceless jewels and gold coins guarded by a evil red-eyed Buddha. He felt anxious “will I be brave enough to complete the mission?” He thought fearfully. He rapidly packed his sack with all the things he would need, including water and fresh bread. As the sun blazed down relentlessly, Zhao examined his map meticulously before setting off on his journey. The entire village waved and cheered as he left, he felt nervous but excited. Two hours later, he had reached the edge of the desert “there’s no turning back now” he thought as he took his first step onto the hot sand, the journey had begun!

The journey through the desert, along the Silk Road was dangerous and risky. Along the way, he spotted something in the distance. As he got closer, it seemed as though it was getting further and further away, he was so confused that he ran as fast as a cheetah, tripped and fell into a sand trap. All of a sudden, he heard thundering sounds coming from above him, he glanced quickly over the top of the trap and saw three wicked bandits on camels heading straight towards him. When they reached him, they looked inside and saw Monk Zhao curled up in a ball, they all pointed at him and burst out laughing “look at this hopeless guy!” They joked. The main bandit jumped in and grabbed him, he threw him onto his camel and shouted “you’re coming with us!” He frowned menacingly as they headed off through the desert. Monk Zhao was panicked and petrified, he had no idea where they were taking him, would he make it out alive? Moments later, he opened his eyes and saw something in the distance, he heard loud screeching and flies buzzing around his head. He shook his head quickly to scare them away and as they got closer he realised where he was, he had reached the Mogao Caves! He felt overjoyed to be there but confused about what the bandits had planned. As the camel drew closer, he looked up and saw the magnificent red temple, glistening in the sunlight, he was awestruck at the many caves that had been carved into the rocks. As he admired them, suddenly the camel halted and dropped him fiercely to the ground. The bandits surrounded him intimidatingly, the main bandit walked towards to him with a piercing stare “my name is Chan, we found your secret map, We want the treasure, defeat the red-eyed Buddha and give it to us!” He bellowed. Monk Zhao was horrified by their demands, but he had no choice but to obey. He nodded to the bandits, picked himself up and stumbled towards the cave entrance to begin his search.

As he trudged to the entrance he saw a giant pair of doors towering above him, he pulled them open and looked inside, he felt like he had traveled back in time, the architecture was like something from another dimension, he looked around the room and saw, five giant Buddhas on each wall painted magnificent colours, there were beautiful, gold patterns covering the ceiling, he felt awestruck. As he wandered around the room, he noticed a small key hidden on one of the Buddhas legs, he was surprised and picked it up, it was shimmering like a jewel and had the letter “S” carved into it. He wondered what it was for and began to search for a door it could open. It didn’t take long for him to spot the tiny wooded door on his left, “bingo!” He thought as he slid the key into the lock and twisted it sharply, it burst open immediately. As he entered he heard weird echoes, creaking and screeching coming from all angles. He wandered around in confusion, then crouched down and saw a cluster of holes in the wall. He was way too big to crawl through the tiny holes so he used his finger to poke inside, he felt around until suddenly something bit him! He shrieked and pulled his hand back. He ran to the other side of the room and leant against the cold, hard wall, suddenly, it began to move, it slid outwards to reveal a secret passage. Although it was frightening, he decided to follow it. He felt his way through the secret passage, until he reached a dead end, he was panicked “what do I do now?” He thought to himself, he was unaware that he was actually standing on quicksand, he gasped as his body quickly began to sink, he tried to shake free but it was no use. He took a deep breath as his head sank and rather than sinking, he landed onto a solid floor. He had landed in the cave of the Red-eyed Buddha, in the darkness he saw red eyes poking out from the cave walls, with a puff of smoke, the red-eyed Buddha himself appeared, he hissed “get out of my cave!” Zhao nervously replied “after I get the treasure!” Zhao picked up a stone and threw it at him, the red-eyed Buddha disintegrated before his eyes then disappeared into thin-air. Relieved, he scanned the cave for the treasure until a shimmering object caught his eye, he moved closer to investigate, he had found it! He was overjoyed but knew he had to be careful. He snuck out the cave behind the back of the bandits and carried it all the way back home where he was greeted by the entire village, they were elated. Monk Zhao became a legend in Kai Chang and everyone knew of his adventures in the Mogao Caves.

# The Monk's Final Wish

*Shrewsbury International School, Lee, Matilda – 10*

“What do I do?!” Fewer and fewer people were visiting the cave. The Head of the Mogao Grottoes was panicked that his creation was going to be forgotten soon. He sighed and gently put his hand on the beige, leather cover of an antique book.” There is now only one thing to do.” he said firmly. He wrote a quick message in the book and stepped outside. “I hope somebody worthy finds you...” And with a final wave of his hand, the mysterious monk disappeared...

★

A millennium later, Qing and her family were visiting a lake beside their village. It was a lovely place with no fishes, but blooming, beautiful lilies. They all went carefully down a cliff and to the lake. The family had a relaxing time soaking up the sun and splashing in the transparent, soothing water. The sky was getting dark so they decided to leave. Just as Qing was about to get out of the water, she felt a rumble beneath her feet. It was like a miniscule earthquake. “Mama, Papa something’s not right...” she frowned. “I think– “ But just as about when she was going to finish her sentence, the ground beneath her erupted and she was sent flying up into the air! “Qing!!!” her parents screeched. As Qing was suspended in mid-air, her eyes glazed over and suddenly everything went pitch black.

“W—where am I?” Qing was waking up with her wet, sandy hair in her face, dazed and confused. As she looked around at her surroundings, she saw lush, tropical trees; a large temple anchored into the golden sand; and some statues of elegant people. Slowly, she stood up and started walking to the temple. She had a feeling that it was calling her to come inside it. As she got closer, she noticed all the little details carved onto the walls. There were pictures of books, treasure chests and wise monks. When she got inside, there was a fork in the temple. One of the signs on the doorways said ‘Money’ and the other said ‘Books’. Qing thought hard and decided to go with books. Even though her family could be millionaires, she decided to go with her gut feeling. She just felt that it was right. When she entered the tunnel, she gasped. She was awestruck by what she saw in that room.

The room was adorned in zigzags of gold and it was ginormous. There were scrolls of Chinese stories, art of ancient emperors and a thick, worn book with yellowed pages. In wonder, Qing carefully flipped to the first page and noticed that there was faded writing on it. It was almost illegible but she could just make out the writing. Here’s what it said, “Dear Reader, congratulations. You are the first person who chose books instead of money. My island knows if a greedy person came visiting. A long time ago, many people used to walk through these halls. But after a period of time, visitors started to forget about this place. I was so sad, I closed it down, putting many artifacts into one of the two rooms. In money, I put a booby trap and, in this room, I put lots of treasure for a worthy person such as you. Hopefully, my cave will once be discovered again. I wish you the best of luck and there is a map of how to get back to the village. Sincerely, the Head Monk of Mogao Grottoes.”

★

Twenty years later, Qing was gazing proudly at her museum and all that she had achieved. Quickly, many people had gathered in to catch a glimpse of her artifacts. She felt so delighted that she had made her own museum. Mostly, she hoped that she had pleased the monk who she appreciated. “If you’re watching from above, I just want to let you know that your dream has come true,” She smiled.

# The Mogao Caves

*Shrewsbury International School, Wang, Olivia – 9*

Long, long ago, there lived a monk called Wang Yuan Lu. One day he was walking in the desert and found himself faced with ancient caves. Around the caves were millions, billions, or even trillions of different buddhas. The caves were called the Mogao Caves. The caves were almost falling down. Wang Yuan Lu said to himself, “it’s the last chance to save the caves”. This is the story of Wang Yuan Lu and his adventures to the East to save the Mogao Caves.

“Crash!” waves splashed higher and higher almost reaching the Sun. The only one on the ship was Wang Yuan Lu who was talking to himself, “Why did I ever go on this journey, I am crazy for risking my life!”. Wang Yuan Lu shook his head in despair. “Boom!” The noise threw him out of bed and up to see if land was near. Seeing the black sky was not a good sign, it was about to rain. Wang Yuan Lu quickly took his scrolls under the deck. He stayed under the deck for a week by passing the time he taught himself to read the scrolls. After a week of sailing, Wang Yuan Lu finally saw land. Without thinking Wang Yuan Lu got out a paddler and paddled himself to land. When his paddler reached land, he jumped out of his paddler and kissed the ground with sheer delight. He had made it; Tokyo was bustling in front of him.

He asked people that lived in Tokyo to give him directions to the man’s house. Wang Yuan Lu finally found a person that knew where the man lived. The person also agreed to take Wang Yuan Lu to the man’s house. When they arrived at the man’s house the person who took him there said goodbye and wished him luck.

“Screech!” The sliding peephole opened. “Hello? Who’s there?” said a furious man, “Be quick or go away.” So, Wang Yuan Lu quickly spoke.

“Excuse me, my name is Wang Yuan Lu, and my friend gave me your address. I am the man who sent you a letter about a month ago. Do you remember me? And would you like to buy some scrolls?”

“Oh yes, I’ve been expecting you for a long time, how much are those scrolls?”

“\$20 for a set, but \$30 for 2 sets.”

“What! That expensive, I would rather give you \$1 for you to go away.”

“But I can’t sell it for too cheap, they were used a long, long time ago, around 1000 years ago, they are also very delicate.”

“Well.....then fine, \$10 for a set so I can study them.”

“Oh, thank you very much sir.”

As Wang Yuan Lu headed back to his ship, he felt really happy that he had sold his first set of scrolls.

And so, Wang Yuan Lu continued on his journey across the world...