

Title: *Bound* by Donna Jo Napoli (Published in 2006)

Approved for use in High School Reading Intervention Setting

Summary of the Work:

Bound is a historical fiction novel set in ancient China and offers a unique retelling of the Cinderella story. The novel follows Xing Xing, a poor, orphaned girl living with her cruel stepmother and half-sister. Unlike her half-sister, Xing Xing's feet are not bound, a practice seen as essential for marriage and social advancement in her culture. While her stepmother prioritizes physical beauty and societal status, Xing Xing finds strength in her intelligence, compassion, and a deep connection to her late parents' values. As hardships mount, Xing Xing must navigate societal expectations, injustice, and her own sense of identity in order to find freedom and self-worth.

Rationale:

Bound by Donna Jo Napoli is an accessible novel that supports the development of reading comprehension while offering rich opportunities for cultural and thematic exploration. Set in ancient China, the story blends historical fiction with a retelling of the Cinderella tale, making it both engaging and familiar to struggling readers. Its clear narrative structure, vivid imagery, and emotionally relatable characters make it an ideal anchor text for building key literacy skills such as inference, theme analysis, and character development. *Bound* provides a meaningful framework for exploring the essential question: How can we honor culture while forging our own path? Through the journey of Xing Xing, a young girl caught between traditional expectations and her own sense of identity, students are encouraged to think critically about cultural norms, individual agency, and the balance between respect for heritage and personal growth.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Booklist

Highlighted the novel's "strong, unforgettable characters," emphasizing the depth and complexity of its protagonists. Amazon, Barnes & Nobil, Simon & Schuster

Historical Novel Society

Praised *Bound* for its blend of historical accuracy and fairy tale elements, stating that Napoli "offers a complex story, combining actual history with fairytale elements." Historical

Novel Society

The Book Smugglers

Noted the novel as "a beautifully written, deeply layered and subversive novel," filled with questions of family, the role of women, and the notions of independence versus tradition.

Noted Distinction:

- School Library Journal Best Books of the Year
- CCBC Choices (Cooperative Children's Book Council)
- Thumbs Up! Award Top Ten Title (Michigan)
- Kentucky Bluegrass Award Master List
- ALA Best Books for Young Adults
- Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults (American Library Association)
- Kansas NEA Reading Circle List Junior Title
- Charlotte Award Suggested Reading List (New York)
- PSLA Fiction List (Pennsylvania School Librarians Association)
- Publishers Weekly Best Books
- Chicago Public Library's Best of the Best

Lexile Score: 730

Readability Level: 5.7

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: CCSS 9-10.1, 9-10.2, 9-10.3, 9-10.5, 9-10.6, 9-10.9

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

By combining approachable text complexity with deep thematic relevance, *Bound* serves as both a literacy tool and a springboard for thoughtful discussion, personal reflection, and cultural awareness.

Additional Connections:

The novel reinforces essential skills such as making inferences, determining the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary in context, and drawing evidence from texts to support written and verbal responses. Through its connection to the essential question: How can we honor culture while forging our own path? the text supports inquiry-based learning and aligns with units focused on identity, tradition, and resilience, making it a valuable anchor for interdisciplinary themes across literature and social studies.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Bound aligns with key elements of the high school English Language Arts curriculum, particularly in the areas of reading comprehension, literary analysis, and cultural understanding. The novel supports instruction in analyzing character development, identifying central themes, and understanding how setting and culture influence plot and conflict. As a historical fiction text rooted in traditional Chinese customs, *Bound* also offers opportunities for students to explore diverse perspectives and examine how individuals navigate cultural expectations.