



A Teacher's Guide for Grades 4-12

based upon the picture book
written by Margaret Chiu Greanias and
illustrated by Tracy Subisak

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About the Book...

Amah Faraway is the story of a young girl's visit to see her grandmother far away in Taipei. It's a story about how families connect and love across distance, language, and culture. At first Kylie is uncomfortable with the less-familiar customs and food. However, she soon begins to see Taipei through her grandmother's eyes and is no longer scared of what is new.

Amah Faraway may be used to teach **three signposts**:

- **Contrast and Contradiction:** Identify the moment Kylie acts in a surprising way or against the expectation of what the author has set up. Ask yourself why would she act this way?
- **Aha! Moment:** Identify the moment that Kylie realizes, understands, or figures something out. How could this change the story for her? What does this say about the theme of the story?
- **Tough Questions:** Identify the time when Kylie asks herself a tough question. What does the question make Kylie wonder about? How does this lead to her figuring things out?

Writing Thematic Statements:

Pick one of the following themes to write a thematic statement for *Amah Faraway*.

- strangeness and familiarity
- overcoming fear of the new or unfamiliar
- intergenerational relationships
- experiences of the diaspora

About the Structure...

Margaret Chiu Greanias has written *Amah Faraway* as a **modified reverse poem**, in which the text from the first half of the story repeats in the second half but with new meaning. The climax of the story also includes the pivotal moment of the text, in which lines begin to repeat but in reverse, with new emotional resonance due to changes in punctuation and context.

This modified reverse poem structure works well for journey stories, such as *Amah Faraway* in which the character goes on an emotional journey, as well as a physical one.

1. Copy the text of *Amah Faraway* onto a sheet of paper to see how this reverse poem structure looks in text-only.
 - a. Can you see how the lines from the first and second halves of the story match?
 - b. Can you note when the text pivots?
 - c. Why do you think Greanias chose to pivot the text in this scene?

2. Map Kylie's emotions line by line.
 - a. How does her emotion change as the story goes on?
3. Can you think of an emotional journey that you have taken? Maybe a time when you were nervous about something but in the end, you grew more confident?
 - a. What was the moment of pivot for you?

Write Your Own Reverse Poem...

Try writing reverse poem. The poem will express different points of view/attitudes. It can be as short as two lines or as many lines as you choose.

1. Pick a topic that you have opposite/conflicting feelings about. Ideas include a season like winter, school, a sibling, sleep, the dark, etc.
2. Brainstorm words, phrases, opinions you associate with your topic.
3. Piece together your words, phrases, opinions into a poem that expresses a tone or opinion.
4. Read it top to bottom and bottom to top.

In many reverse poems, general lines are sandwiched by negative or positive lines. For example:

Winter is fun.
It is not true that
snow ruins everything.

Snow ruins everything.
It is not true that
winter is fun.

Other general lines include: I tell you this, it is plain to see, it is not plain to see, I will never believe that, I believe that, in the future, is more important than, I do not agree that, are greater than, are less than, it's wrong that, it's not wrong that, people should believe that, people should not believe that, it is not true that, it is true that, I don't doubt that, I believe that, I will never believe that, it is not true that, it is true that, there is no way that

Tips:

- You can write each line on a notecard so you can easily shift the order
- You can break up the lines in different ways, even making them as short as 1-word long

Most importantly, play! This is all about trying things and seeing if they work. You'll learn as you go.

Advanced tools: point of view, punctuation, phrasing, word choice, synonyms, context. Here are some examples:

Point of View:

Amah showed her
the city
she loved.

She loved
the city
Amah showed her.

Synonym/Context:

Ten twelve-person tables
and over nine courses of steaming food!
GULP!
Kylie ate... rice.
Finally.

Finally,
Kylie ate rice...
GULP!
and over nine courses of steaming food!
Ten twelve-person tables-

Punctuation:

Kylie ate... rice.
Finally.

Finally,
Kylie ate rice...