



MAO'S LAST DANCER



Synopsis

Based on the best selling autobiography, *Mao's Last Dancer* weaves a moving tale about the quest for freedom and the courage it takes to live your own life. The film compellingly captures the struggles, sacrifices and triumphs, as well as the intoxicating effects of first love and celebrity amid the pain of exile.

Mao's Last Dancer stars Chi Cao, a gifted dancer and principal at the Birmingham Royal Ballet, making his impressive screen debut as Li Cunxin. The cast is rounded out by Bruce Greenwood, Kyle Maclachlan, Joan Chen and Amanda Schull.

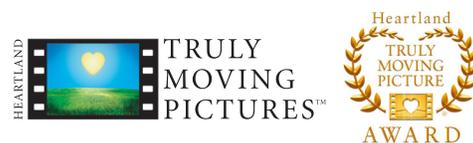
Discussion Questions

- Li is very unhappy during his early years at the Academy and confides in a teacher that he doesn't like ballet and doesn't understand it. What happens to change his attitude?
- Do you think the hardship, cruelty and deprivation Li suffered during his years at the Academy were justified by his later achievements?
- Li says to Liz, 'I must dance political ballet in China, but I dance better here, because I feel more free'. What limitations are placed on artistic expression in Communist China? What do you make of the revolutionary ballet we see performed for Madame Mao?
- Why does Ben feel so strongly that Li should return to China? What exactly is Li jeopardizing for Ben by his actions? Why does Ben feel personally betrayed? Do you think Ben fully understands what life is like for Li in China?
- What factors account for the breakdown of Li's marriage to Elizabeth? Do you believe they would have married if Li had been allowed to extend his stay in America?



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Questions excerpted from A *Mao's Last Dancer* Study Guide by Kate Raynor

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- Do you think that if Elizabeth had been accepted into the Company that her marriage to Li might have been happier?
- Li says, 'The best advice I received was from my mother when I left home at age 11. It is to not look back, to keep going forward.' What is the best advice you have ever received? What advice would you like to give a younger friend or sibling at an important turning point in their life?
- Li is instructed by a Chinese official prior to his trip to America, 'When in doubt, let your communist principles guide you'. What exactly are 'communist principles' and how do you believe they guided Li's actions in America?

Activities

- Read Li Cunxin's autobiography, *Mao's Last Dancer*, upon which the movie was based. Use the book to further explore China's political climate in which Li grew up, as well as the rest of Li's story in America.
- Put Li's story into historical context by exploring the timeline of events at: www.maoslastdancer-movie.com.
- Follow *Mao's Last Dancer* and Heartland Truly Moving Pictures on Facebook to see what others are saying about the film: www.facebook.com/maoslastdancer and www.facebook.com/heartlandtmp.

Get Involved

- Seek to become an unofficial goodwill ambassador who embarks on peer to peer friendship missions. These can be city to city, state to state, or even country to country.
- Become penpals with someone from China or another country so that you can learn more about the similarities and differences between cultures, and cultivate better understanding of others in the process.



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