

For Review Only

Brian Seward • Francis Chua

The Magic Paintbrush

Tony looked again at the colourful picture book. He read the title — *Ma Liang and the Magic Paintbrush*. “If only I could read it,” he thought. “I wonder what the story is about. The picture on the book cover looks so interesting.”

The Magic Paintbrush tells the story of Tony Lee, a 10-year-old boy who craves a little relief from hours of studying. Tony is tired and needs a short break. Now, who better to grant it than a magic paintbrush?

Share in this uplifting tale of a big-hearted boy who outsmarted an evil Emperor and his dim-witted foot soldiers with his ability to think quickly. Set in ancient China, *The Magic Paintbrush* teaches important lessons about friendship, the dangers of abusing power, and the value of creativity.

It's a colouring book too!

This isn't just a story book. Young readers will be able to fill in the colours in this beautifully illustrated book.



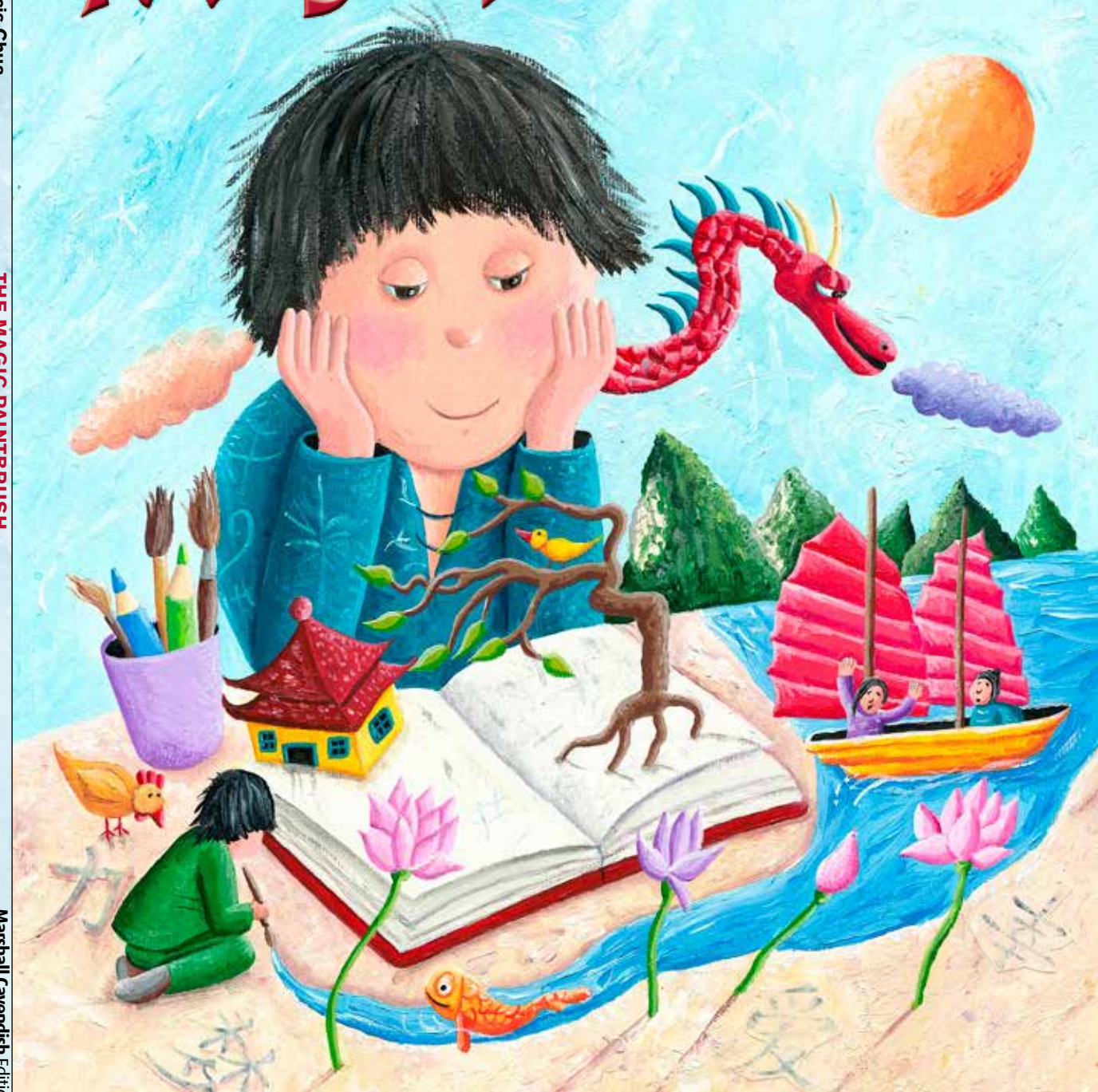
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To my parents, who allowed me
the freedom to find my own
magic paintbrush.

To the cast and crew of the productions of
The Magic Paintbrush, who amazingly
brought the characters to life.

Foreword

In 2000, I was approached by a composer and a puppet maker, who both had a crazy idea. Why not create a musical theatre show with puppets? My job was to be the writer and director of the show. At that time I was running an educational drama company, and knew little about musicals – and even less about puppet shows! Nearly everyone laughed at the idea, but against the odds, we managed to create *The Magic Paintbrush* – a show that was the inspiration for the creation of I Theatre as a theatre producing company. I Theatre celebrates its 15th anniversary in 2016, thanks in no small part to this milestone production.

The Magic Paintbrush is a wonderful old Chinese folk tale, about a thoughtful and generous boy whose cleverness and determination leads to the downfall of a greedy Emperor, and a better life for many. It is part of a vast heritage of stories that are sitting on our own front porch. These stories remind us of values and truths worth remembering. In an age when everything is instant and on-screen, they encourage us to look up and experience first-hand the wonderful world around us.

We are often driven by success and wealth, and the desire for our children to do better than we did. This classic story holds a timely reminder of the value of creativity and of the arts that we neglect at our peril. It tells of the power of friendship and a generous and giving heart, and reminds us of what is truly valuable.

Enjoy!

Brian Seward

October 2016

The sky was turning dark blue. It was going to be a still, starless night. Down below, street lamps were coming on. Inside a small grey bedroom, up on the twelfth floor of an apartment block in Phoenix Road, a small ten-year-old boy was sitting at his desk. Tony Lee was trying to do his homework.

There were books everywhere – on the bookshelves, on his desk and even in piles on the floor. They were all school books and study guides.

Tony sighed. He stared at the homework in front of him. The work was so tough – and so boring! Leaning back in his chair, Tony looked around the room. Something caught his eye.

A bright, colourful picture book stood on the far end of one bookshelf. Next to it was an enormous red box of paints, colouring pencils and crayons. They were gifts from his birthday three weeks ago. Tony sighed again.

“I’m only ten years old,” he thought. “Why can’t I have some time for play?” He stretched and looked longingly at the picture book on the bookshelf. It seemed to be inviting him to read it.



“I can’t read you now,” thought Tony sadly. “There is so much more studying to do.”

The door opened gently and Tony’s mother came in, carrying a drink. Tony quickly picked up a pencil and scribbled something in his book. She smiled at him.

“Well, Tony,” she asked, “are you still studying your maths?” Tony nodded. “Good. Now remember your exams. They’re very important. Here, have a drink, and relax for a few minutes.” Tony smiled, said, “Thanks, Ma,” and took the drink.

Just then, his father walked in. He stared hard at Tony and then said in a booming voice, “Come on, boy! Study hard, study smart. There’s no time for rest or play! You must work hard to be the best in your class!”

Tony put his drink down, and picked up his maths book again. His mother gave him a little pat, and a smile, then followed his father out of the room.



Tony felt sad. He wanted to do well in his exams, but he wanted to play sometimes too! How he wished he could just paint, or even make a drawing or two, for a while. They were his favourite activities. Look at that brand new painting and drawing kit sitting on the shelf. He hadn't had any time to use it yet!

Tony looked again at the colourful picture book. He read the title – *Ma Liang and the Magic Paintbrush*. “If only I could read it,” he thought. “I wonder what the story is about. The picture on the book cover looks so interesting. I really should be studying, but maybe I could take a small break. Just for five minutes...”

Tony got up from his chair and walked over to the shelf. He took down the picture book, careful not to make a sound. Sitting on the edge of his bed, he slowly turned to the first page.

“Once upon a time, there was a boy named Ma Liang, whose mother and father had died when he was a child, so that he had to earn his living by

gathering firewood and cutting weeds. Ma Liang was a clever boy who longed to paint, but could not afford to buy even one brush...”



“What a shame!” Tony thought. “I have so many brushes, and pencils, and paints. I wonder what Ma Liang would have painted? Maybe a dragon? Perhaps a castle? I think he would have painted a big, red dragon!”

Without thinking, Tony took down and opened his enormous red box, found some colouring pencils, sat down and started to draw a big, red dragon. He didn’t notice the door opening, or his father standing in the doorway with a new maths study book in his hand. His father was furious!

He shouted so loudly that Tony knocked over the red box in surprise, and spilled his drink on the floor. “You cannot be trusted! I am ashamed of you! I thought you were studying, but you were playing all this time!”

“But Dad, I was only...” stammered Tony. His father would not listen to him. He continued to scold Tony loudly. “Nothing good was ever achieved without hard work. You must study, study, study to succeed!”

Then, gathering up all of Tony’s paints, pens and pencils, he stomped out of the room, slamming the door.





Brian Seward

Artistic Director
I Theatre

Originally trained in science, with a BSc (honours) in Botany, Brian changed direction a decade later by gaining a post-graduate degree in secondary teaching, specialising in Drama and English. From there he worked as Head of Drama in a secondary school in Harlow, Essex. Since 1995 he has worked in Singapore teaching drama, helping schools to put on productions, writing and directing plays, and occasionally acting.

Since 1999 he has directed, written and produced on average four professional productions a year as Artistic Director and founder of I Theatre; including Singapore's first full-length puppet and live action musical, *The Magic Paintbrush*. The Asian-themed *Dancing with Dragons* played to rave reviews at the Edinburgh Festival 2004, followed by *The Rainbow Fish* and *Under the Dragon Moon* in 2007. Other productions appearing outside Singapore include: *The Rainbow Fish* in India and Australia; *The Acorn* and *Dancing with Dragons* in Malaysia, *The Little Red Hen*, *Moonbird*, *The Rainbow Fish* in New Jersey, USA, *Round The Moon* in Hong Kong and Japan, and *Jewels In The Tale* in Korea.

His first children's book, *The Magic Paintbrush*, was published by Marshall Cavendish International in May 2004.