

SESSION 2

Read the following passage about a special author. Then answer questions 23-31 that follow.

The Journey of Pearl S. Buck

She was just three months old when her adventure began. For 40 years, she lived in a world few Americans of her time knew. Throughout her journey, she shared what she learned with the world.

This extraordinary story began on June 26, 1892, when Pearl Sydenstricker was born in West Virginia. Her parents, Absalom and Caroline, were missionaries who had committed their lives to seeking converts to Christianity and working among the poor in China. By autumn, the Sydenstrickers had returned to Chinkiang, on the Yangtze River.

A Foreigner at Home

China was as different from the United States as any place on Earth, but it was home to young Pearl Sydenstricker. She spoke Chinese, had Chinese tutors, attended school in Shanghai, and, from an early age, wrote stories about her adopted homeland.

Pearl may have felt Chinese, but the Sydenstrickers were foreigners—and China was in turmoil. Many Chinese were angry about the political and economic power foreign countries had over them. This anger found expression in a nationalist movement called the Boxer Rebellion. In 1899, the nationalists began attacking foreigners. Pearl's family was forced to flee, first to Shanghai, and then to the United States. But they returned to China as committed as ever. Apart from attending college in the United States, Pearl remained there with them.

Anhwei and Nanking

In 1915, Pearl met John Buck, an American agricultural economist. The young couple married and moved to rural Anhwei province, where John conducted fieldwork among the region's poor farmers.

Pearl split her time between teaching and accompanying her husband as a translator. No one knew it then, but Anhwei would become one of the most important parts of Pearl's life. However, the Bucks left Anhwei in 1920 for the city of Nanking.

It was another turbulent period for China. The Chinese monarchy had collapsed in 1912, leading to the establishment of the Republic of China. But by 1916, the Republic was crumbling. China's central government was struggling for control with revolutionary groups and regional powers. The threat of chaos loomed throughout the Buck's Nanking years. They were difficult years for the Bucks on a personal level, too. In 1921, their daughter Carol was born with severe disabilities. That same year, Pearl's mother passed away.

Amid the turmoil and pain, however, Pearl established herself as a writer. She began publishing articles and stories in magazines, including *The Atlantic* and *The Nation*. Her major subject, of course, was China.

Pearl spent part of 1925 and 1926 in the United States, seeking care for Carol and earning a degree in literature, but she returned to China. In 1927, however, the looming chaos erupted. Nationalist forces, attempting to seize power, battled against

Chinese communists and local warlords in Nanking. In the chaos, foreigners became targets for violence. Fearing for their lives, the Bucks fled to Shanghai and then to Japan. Pearl Buck's time in China was coming to an end. But the country remained part of her consciousness—and of her work.

Sharing the Treasures

In 1930, the first novel by Pearl S. Buck was published. *East Wind, West Wind* focused on a Chinese woman's encounters with western culture. Next, Pearl turned to her memories of Anhwei's farmers. She began writing the story of Wang Lung, a poor farmer who manages to become wealthy. Along the way, however, his family loses the virtues they seemed to draw from the earth itself.

The Good Earth appeared in 1931 and was a huge best-seller. The novel had a straightforward style and universal themes that made it easy for readers to appreciate. It also contained a powerful vision of Chinese life and culture. Pearl S. Buck was catapulted to fame. *The Good Earth* won the Pulitzer Prize, and in 1938, she became the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Some critics complained that Pearl, who had been writing for such a short time, had not earned this honor. Her accomplishment, though, was not how much she had written. It was how much she had experienced—an enormous treasure trove of life experiences that she shared with the world.

Her Legacy

Pearl S. Buck had always been concerned about human rights. In the United States, she was actively involved with both the civil rights and women's rights movements. She published essays in *Opportunity*, an Urban League magazine and *Crisis*, the NAACP's journal. For two decades, Pearl also served as a trustee of Howard University, a well-respected African-American university. Throughout her life, she was not afraid to stand up for what she believed in. Her strong sense of right and wrong drove her to fight against injustice and prejudice.

It did not matter to her that her ideas were not popular with everyone. Many people liked things the way they were and did not welcome change. However, what mattered to Pearl was that people should be treated fairly and with dignity.

Her experiences in China would have a lasting impact on her life. Pearl founded the East and West Association in 1942, which was dedicated to improving communication and cultural exchange between the West and Asia. When Pearl learned that most adoption services would not even attempt to find homes for children of Asian and mixed-race backgrounds, she was outraged. She founded Welcome House, the first international agency that specialized in interracial adoptions. She also established the Pearl S. Buck Foundation to aid thousands of children in various Asian countries. Welcome House and the Pearl S. Buck Foundation merged in 1991 to form Pearl S. Buck International. The many goals of this organization include improving the quality of life for children and promoting the values of other cultures.

Pearl S. Buck died in 1973 after a life filled with experiences that shaped her outlook and her writing. She poured what she observed and what she learned into the pages of her articles and books. She opened a window into a culture that for many people was still a mystery. Pearl once said, "The person who tries to live alone will not succeed as a human being. His heart withers if it does not answer another heart. His mind shrinks away if he hears only the echoes of his own thoughts and finds no other inspiration." Ideas like this are clearly reflected in her life and work.



Pearl S. Buck,
around 1932
Photo by Arnold Genthe,
Library of Congress

23. Why did the author most likely write this passage?

- A to encourage the reader to read Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*
- B to describe Pearl S. Buck's experiences in China
- C to persuade the reader that Pearl S. Buck deserved the Nobel Prize
- D to inform the reader about Pearl S. Buck's experiences and accomplishments

24. Which statement from the passage **best** supports the author's purpose?

- A "She spoke Chinese, had Chinese tutors, attended school in Shanghai"
- B "*The Good Earth* appeared in 1931 and was a huge best-seller."
- C "In the chaos, foreigners became targets for violence."
- D "Pearl S. Buck died in 1973 after a life filled with experiences that shaped her outlook and her writing."

25. How did the political turmoil in China affect Pearl Buck?

- A It made her feel Chinese even though she was foreign.
- B It forced her to flee China with her family.
- C It made her unhappy while she lived in Anhwei.
- D It inspired her to write stories and articles about China.

26. What was the most likely reason that Pearl Buck wrote *The Good Earth*?

- A She wanted to be a famous, prize-winning novelist.
- B A farmer named Wang Lung asked her to tell his story.
- C She was unhappy and frightened after fleeing Nanking.
- D She wanted to share her memories of Anhwei with the world.

27. Which of these is an opinion?
- A “China was as different from the United States as any place on Earth”
 - B “In 1930, the first novel by Pearl S. Buck was published.”
 - C “Pearl founded the East and West Association in 1942”
 - D “The young couple married and moved to rural Anhwei province”
28. Which generalization is supported by the passage?
- A A writer’s life is an easy one.
 - B People are exactly the same all over the world.
 - C Most countries welcome the contributions of foreigners.
 - D There is great value in learning about different cultures.

29. Read the following sentence.
- For Wang Lung, riches came with a price that may have been too steep.
- The **best** place to add this sentence to the passage would be in the section under
- A “A Foreigner at Home.”
 - B “Anhwei and Nanking.”
 - C “Sharing the Treasures.”
 - D “Her Legacy.”
30. Read the following sentence from the passage.
- “But the country remained part of her consciousness—and of her work.”
- What does the word consciousness mean?
- A almost conscious
 - B state of being conscious
 - C capable of being conscious
 - D like conscious

