# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Overview</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewer Objectives</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Lesson Plan</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Blackline Masters</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer Key</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript of the Video</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Resources</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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We Are All One

Program Overview

Intended Audience and Uses

*We Are All One* has been produced for language arts and social studies students in both primary and intermediate grades, although it also can be used at junior high/senior high levels. Created specifically for classroom use, it can be enjoyed by viewers of all ages. The story also has a more complex inner structure that addresses cultural aspects of Chinese society that older, more sophisticated viewers can explore. (See *An Interview with the Producer* in the blackline handout section of this guide.) This video helps students achieve McREL Language Arts Standard 9, Level I (Grades K-2) Benchmark 1 (Understands the main idea or message in visual media); Benchmark 2 (Uses a variety of strategies to predict content and meaning through visualization); Benchmark 6 (Understands the similarities and differences between real life and life depicted in visual media); Level II (Grades 3-5), Benchmark 2 (Understands
techniques used to convey messages in visual media (e.g., animation); Benchmark 5 (Understands techniques used to establish mood in visual media); Benchmark 6 (Understands the use and meaning of symbols and images in visual media); Level III (Grades 6-8) Standard 9, Benchmark 5 (Understands how language choice is used to enhance visual media); Level IV, (Grades 9-12), Benchmark 9 (Understands how literary forms can be represented in visual narratives); and McREL Arts and Communication, Level IV, Benchmark 4 (Knows the cross-cultural relationships among art motifs, designs and themes of separate societies).

**Story Synopsis**

A wealthy merchant's daughter becomes sick and the doctors who attend her cannot find a cure. In desperation, the merchant offers a reward to anyone who can return his daughter to health. A poor candy peddler, against the wishes of his wife, sets out on a quest looking for a magical herb that is supposed to cure all illnesses. Walking through
a forest, he notices that an ant hill is about to be washed away. He redirects the water by removing a stone, and the ants are saved. Later, in a dream, ant soldiers take him to the queen ant, who says the ants will offer help whenever he needs assistance. Still later, the peddler saves a caterpillar from a ravenous bird and, in another dream, the caterpillar tells the peddler where he can find a magical bead. The peddler locates the bead the next day, returns it to the merchant and is rewarded after the merchant's daughter returns to perfect health.

Beyond being a captivating story, *We Are All One* illustrates several key traits of traditional Chinese society.

- As set forth in *Buddhist philosophy*, the belief that all things in nature (both humans and other animals) are interrelated.

- *Non-western medical practices* such as acupuncture, herbal medicine and cupping.
The belief that harming animals is harming ourselves.

The importance of kindness.

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**VIEWER OBJECTIVES**

After viewing this video and participating in the suggested activities, viewers should be able to do the following:
1. Summarize the story.
2. Briefly explain the role of Buddhism in Chinese society.
3. Discuss the philosophy of kindness inherent in the story.
4. Distinguish between fiction (make believe) and non-fiction (real).
5. Identify the story elements of character, setting, plot, point of view and theme in *We Are All One.*
The producers encourage you to make adaptations and changes to the following lesson plan whenever you feel it will enhance your students’ learning experiences. Only by tailoring the material to your unique classroom situation will you be able to maximize the educational experience afforded by these materials.

SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

Viewing Strategies

Various strategies may be employed when showing *We Are All One* to your class. If you are using the folktale as part of your language arts instructional program, the story can help explain fiction and folklore. It also can be used to illustrate various facets of story structure – setting, plot, theme, character and point of view. If you are using the program for social studies/geography, you may find it useful to integrate the story into your unit on China or Asia since it illustrates several cultural facets of Asian -- and in particular Chinese society. Regardless of the curriculum area in which the story is used, you may find it useful to show the program more than once – first without instruction, then with a structured lesson or series of lessons (see below) to help students understand the richness of the folktale from both a language arts and social studies perspective.

Previewing Activities

*The producers encourage you to prescreen the program to familiarize yourself with its content.*
If you have not done so already, have someone in the class locate China on a globe or topographical map. Ask what is noteworthy about the country’s geography. Point out that China is a very large country and spreads across much of Asia, and it encompasses many landforms, including mountains, deserts, lowlands, etc. What kinds of work might people in that country do? Mention that today there is a great deal of manufacturing in China because there are rivers to ship manufactured goods and raw materials to Chinese and foreign locations. Now, mention that China is a very old country -- much older than almost any other country in the world. China, often rich cultural countries, very old such as have a very describe "the arts, customs, institutions such as schools and governments, and achievements of a particular people." Explain that China has many different religious customs and various institutions, and that those ancient customs and institutions have, over the years, helped determine the behaviors of the Chinese people. Now, have your students find India on the globe or map. Is it close to China? Mention that countries the lie next to each other often exchange goods, such as agricultural products -- and ideas -- as people travel back and forth between the two countries. One thing that can travel from one country to another is religious ideas.

**Introduce the Video**

Tell the class that Buddhism, which came from India, was a popular religion during many periods of ancient China and that one important Buddhist belief is shown in the story they are about to see. Next, hand out the *Vocabulary*
List and go over the words with your students, making sure they understand each one. Note that the story was set long ago. (The characters wear clothing seen during the T'ang Dynasty, which lasted from 618 AD to 907 AD. Now hand out *Buddhism and Ancient Chinese Medicine* and explain that the information in this handout will help everyone better understand the story. If your class is composed of primary level students, you should read the information aloud and discuss the concepts as needed. Or you may elect to skip these exercises. At the intermediate level, have the class read the information, either aloud or to himself or herself. Discuss the material, then explain that everyone will complete the exercise after viewing the program. Tell the class that after they see the video, you will ask them about ways of living in ancient China, many unique, that are shown in the program. Mention the following items: religion, architecture, clothing, geography, arts and politics. Primary level teachers may find it useful to use only two or three of these items. List the items on your chalkboard or overhead projector. 

-9-
Post-Viewing Activities

Turn the class’s attention to the list on the board or on the overhead projector: Ask your students if they saw anything in the video that might give clues to those items. Under “religion” you should list Buddhism. Did your students notice the statue of the Buddha in the scene of the peddler leaving his town? Under “architecture,” you may list the merchant’s house, the peddler’s home, and the buildings along the street (when the peddler walks home from the merchant’s mansion and when he leaves the town), the wall around the village and the village gates. Under “clothing,” list the Merchant's garb, the clothing of the doctors, and the women's clothing, especially the merchant's wife and the peddler's wife. Mention that today almost all Chinese who live in China's many large cities wear western clothing. Did your students notice that the sandals worn by the peddler's children? Under “geography,” list forests and rivers. Under “arts,” list the statue of the Buddha and the lamps and furniture seen in the bedroom of the merchant's daughter.
If you wish, use the **Discussion Questions – We Are All the Same** to further explore the story.

At this point, primary teachers may duplicate and hand out the **Make Believe or Real?** and the **What Happens Next?** worksheets. After your students have completed these exercises, review and discuss their answers.

**Materials needed for these activities: magic markers or crayons and a pencil.**

Now ask the class if the peddler was foolish to look for the magical herb? If so, why? If not, why not? Is there really such a thing as a magical herb? What about his unshakable belief in his mother's claim that there was such a plant? Ask, "Do you believe everything that your parents tell you?" Explain that in Confucianism, an ancient Chinese philosophy, the elderly are honored. Could that be a reason why the peddler believed his mother? Next, turn your attention to the relationship between the peddler and the animals in the story. How would they characterize that relationship? Was it mutual respect? What did it mean when the peddler and the ant queen stated that "We are all one?" At this point, you may want to read the following quote from Thich Nhat Hanh, a well-known Buddhist monk, teacher, author and poet:

*Buddhism offers a vision (in which) all living beings are identified with all other entities. This vision does not merely teach that we are all in this together, but that we are all this, 'rising and falling as one living body.'*
Explain that Buddhism was a religion that began in India around 430 BC and spread to China about 500 years later. Buddhism has been an important part of Chinese culture ever since, although it has been outlawed by Chinese rulers from time to time.

Now, ask your students if they felt the peddler was a good man? Why or why not? Help your students understand that as with all other people, the peddler is a mixture of good and not so good. It was nice of him to save the caterpillar, for instance. But didn't the bird have a right to its food? It was nice of the peddler to give away some of his candy. But when he gave away the candy, he didn't have enough money to adequately feed his family.

Students undoubtedly will not know the queen ant's reference to Emperor Yu. Have your students look up Yu on the Internet to see why the queen referred to him.
Description of Blackline Masters

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS** – Gives questions that may be asked after the program has been screened.

**VOCABULARY LIST** – Helps familiarize students with some of the terms used in the program.

**BUDDHISM AND ANCIENT CHINESE MEDICINE** – Reveals important background information about Chinese society.

**MAKE BELIEVE OR REAL?** – Helps primary students distinguish between fact and fiction.

**WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?** – Gives students practice in properly sequencing events in a story.

**ANALYZING “WE ARE ALL ONE”** – Helps more advanced students analyze the story’s setting, plot, theme, characters and point of view.

**AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PRODUCER** – Gives additional information about the program and how it was produced.

**CHINESE MUSIC** – An enrichment activity that gives students a basic understanding of traditional Chinese music.

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**ANSWER KEY**


**Vocabulary List:** 1. Not giving up 2. nervous, tense 3. the act of settling on a purpose and not wavering from it 4. to walk, usually on a long journey 5. not used to 6. begin again 7. go down, walk down 8. to get proper position or direction 9. an event that signals good or evil 10. to become renewed or freshened
**Analyzing “We Are All One”**

**Plot exposition:** A poor candy peddler looks for a magical herb to cure an illness contracted by a wealthy merchant’s daughter so he can be rewarded.  
**Rising action:** The peddler helps some ants and a caterpillar, both of which help the peddler find the magical herb.  
**Climax:** The peddler finds the magical herb.  
**Falling action:** The peddler gives the herb to the merchant.  
**Resolution:** The daughter is cured and the peddler receives the reward.  
**Conflict:** Person versus himself (Will the peddler have the mental and physical fortitude to find the herb?)  
**Theme:** Good deeds are rewarded.  
**Setting:** A small village in ancient China.  
**Characters:** the peddler, the merchant, the merchant's daughter, the peddler's wife, the ant queen, the captain of the ants, the caterpillar, the merchant's guard.  
**Point of view:** omniscient.

**What Happens Next?**  
1. The doctor tries to heal the daughter  
2. The merchant speaks.  
3. The peddler leaves his village  
4. The peddler arrives at the spring  
5. The peddler speaks to the caterpillar.  
6. The daughter drinks the magical potion.

### TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

NARRATOR: Long ago, in ancient China, there was a wealthy merchant whose daughter was stricken with a mysterious illness.

The merchant summoned doctors from near and far.

Each did everything he could to exact a cure. But none could return her to good health.

As the days passed, she became weaker and weaker until she could no longer eat or drink.
And her sight began to fail. In desperation, the merchant made an announcement to all the villagers.

He would give a generous reward to anyone who could cure his daughter's illness.

As it happened, a candy peddler was in the crowd that day.

He was known by all for his kindness and generosity. In fact, he gave away as much candy as he sold.

Thus, he was very poor, and his family often went hungry.

On his way home that evening, the peddler recalled that long ago his mother had told him about a magical herb that could cure any illness.

When he told his wife that he planned to search for the herb the following day, she replied...

WIFE: You need to spend your time selling candy, not looking for something you'll never find.

If you search for the herb, there won't be enough money to buy food for the children!

NARRATOR: But the peddler insisted that he could find the herb and that he would be gone only a day or so.

In his absence, he said she could sell the candy.

And so, early the next morning, he left his home and walked a short distance to the wall that surrounded the village.

He marched through its gates, and determined to find the herb, trekked all morning to a distant forest.

By noon, his energy had flagged for he was unaccustomed to walking long distances.

So he rested near a small stream.

Looking down, he noticed that a rock had fallen into the stream, channeling water over an ant hill.
Ants scurried here and there, desperately trying to escape the onrushing torrent.

PEDDLER: We are all one...

NARRATOR: ...said the peddler.

He then tossed away the rock and dug a small ditch that channeled the water back into the stream.

That done, he resumed his search for the magical herb.

By mid afternoon, the peddler was completely exhausted and so decided to nap beneath a giant elm tree.

Soon deep in sleep, a strange dream came upon him.

In it, he found himself wandering through a large city.

As he wandered along, a group of ant soldiers marched up to him.

The captain said...

CAPTAIN: Our queen wishes to see you!

NARRATOR: The astonished peddler was so fearful that he could not even respond.

Thus, the soldiers marched him to the queen's castle.

When the peddler saw the empress, he began to tremble.

QUEEN: Do not be afraid. You are our honored guest, for you tamed the great flood like the hero, Emperor Yu, many years ago.

We are all one. If you need anything, just ask for it and we will assist you.

PEDDLER: Can you help me find the magical herb that heals all illnesses?

QUEEN: I have never heard of such a plant, but I do know that if you continue to look, you will find it.
NARRATOR: With that, the peddler awoke with a start.

And to his amazement, he found himself back at the ant hill by the stream -- where he been earlier in the day!

PEDDLER: Ah! This is a good omen!

NARRATOR: Encouraged by his dream, he began searching with more determination than ever -- with so much perseverance, in fact, that peddler lost track of time.

And before he knew it, darkness had descended upon the forest.

To make matters worse, it suddenly turned frightfully cold!

And to his dismay, he was lost.

Trying to get his bearings, he looked around and spied an object in the distance.

He stumbled forward, until he came upon it -- an old temple that lay in ruins.

Just as he was about to enter, he noticed a brightly colored caterpillar.

It was rushing to get to a small crack in the stairway to escape from a large -- and very hungry -- bird!

The peddler yelled and waved his arms to frighten it away.

PEDDLER: We are all one, you and I.

NARRATOR: Then the peddler gathered some tender leaves to make a tasty meal for his new friend.

PEDDLER: Just because I don't have any food doesn't mean that you have to go hungry.

NARRATOR: That night, as the peddler slept, he slipped into a dream once again.

PEDDLER: Huh! I must be getting edgy! Good night.

-17-
CATERPILLAR: You and I are one. Tomorrow, walk northward until you see a large pine tree with three trunks.

At the bottom of it, you will find a small bead. If the bead is dissolved in pure spring water, and if the merchant's daughter drinks it, she will be healed.

NARRATOR: The peddler now realized that it was the caterpillar who was speaking to him.

Early the next morning, the peddler again set off on his quest, heading northward.

He looked for the pine tree all day long, but alas, had no luck.

Late in the afternoon, he was just about to give up before deciding to push ahead just a bit farther.

Several minutes later he saw the strange-looking tree.

The peddler immediately began searching beneath it.

But his old eyes were too weak to find a tiny bead among the thousands of pine needles.

Disheartened, he began to weep.

But then he remembered what the queen ant had told him.

PEDDLER: Ants! Please help me find the bead!

NARRATOR: Instantly, an untold number of ants appeared from beneath the ground and began to search.

It took only a minute or so for them to find the bead!

PEDDLER: Ahhh!

NARRATOR: The old peddler put it away as if it were a priceless jewel.

PEDDLER: Thank you, my little friends...and please thank your queen for me!

NARRATOR: Now rejuvenated, the peddler quickly made his way back through the forest and into his village.
The following day, early in the morning, he went to the merchant's house, where he was met by a gatekeeper.

GATEKEEPER: Halt! A poor man like you cannot enter here.

PEDDLER: I have come to heal the merchant's daughter!

GATEKEEPER: Ha! How could you, a poor peddler, cure her?

PEDDLER: Poor or rich, we are all one.

NARRATOR: Just then, the merchant walked by the gate and overheard the conversation.

MERCHANT: Let him enter. I said anyone could see me. I hope you'll not waste my time!

PEDDLER: If you dissolve this magical bead in fresh spring water and have your daughter drink it, she will be cured

NARRATOR: The merchant followed the peddler's instructions.

And his daughter returned to perfect health!

The merchant was so grateful that he tripled his reward.

And so, the kindly candy peddler and his family never went hungry again, and were content for the rest of their lives.

Web Resources

Chinese Culture
http://cultural-china.com/
An excellent source with a multitude of internal links to information on many different aspects of Chinese culture.

Chinese History
http://www-chaos.umd.edu/history/toc.html
The University of Maryland's review of Chinese history from its Chaos Research Facility.

Folktales from China
http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/china.html
Eleven Chinese folktales compiled by Prof. D.L. Ashliman at the University of Pittsburgh
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Questions – We Are All One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Who was the main character in the story? (the peddler)</td>
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<td>2. What did he do for a living? (He sold candy.)</td>
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<td>3. Why did the merchant offer a reward? (He wanted someone to find a cure for his daughter's illness.)</td>
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<td>4. How did the doctors try to cure the merchant's daughter? (with eastern medicine such as herbs, acupuncture and cupping)</td>
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<td>5. What was the candy peddler known for? (kindness and generosity)</td>
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<td>6. Do you think the peddler was really kind? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)</td>
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<td>7. What did he remember on his way home? (that his mother had told him about a magical herb that cured all illnesses)</td>
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<td>8. What was the peddler's wife's reaction to his plan to find the herb? (She didn't want him to search for it.)</td>
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<td>9. What was her reason for objecting to his plan? (He wouldn't earn any money to feed the family.)</td>
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<td>10. How did the peddler plan to solve the problem of not earning money? (His wife would sell the candy)</td>
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<td>11. Where did the peddler look for the herb? (in a distant forest)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. How did the peddler save the ants? (by moving the rock and channeling the water away from the ant hill)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Who took the peddler to see the ant queen? (the captain of the ants and the ants)</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. When the peddler awoke from his dream, where did he find himself? (back at the stream)</td>
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<td>15. What did the peddler see when it turned dark? (a temple)</td>
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<td>16. What did the peddler save at the temple? (a caterpillar)</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. What else did the peddler do for the caterpillar? (gathered leaves for a meal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. What did the caterpillar tell the peddler? (where to find the magical herb)</td>
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<td>19. How would the peddler know where to find the bead? (It would be at the bottom of a pine with three trunks.)</td>
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<td>20. Who helped the peddler find the bead? (the ants)</td>
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<td>21. What did the merchant do when his daughter was cured? (tripled his reward)</td>
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Vocabulary List

The program you will see, *We Are All One* takes place in ancient China. Because of that, there will probably be some words in the video that will be unfamiliar to you. They are listed below. After finding their definitions, write a sentence using the word.

1. **Perseverance**
   Sentence:

2. **Edgy**
   Sentence:

3. **Determination**
   Sentence:

4. **Trek**
   Sentence:

5. **Unaccustomed**
   Sentence:

6. **Resume**
   Sentence:

7. **Descend**
   Sentence:

8. **Bearings**
   Sentence:

9. **Omen**
   Sentence:

10. **Rejuvenated**
    Sentence:
Buddhism was founded by an Indian prince, Siddharta Gautama, in 520 BC. It is the fourth largest religion today, with more than 360 million followers, mostly in China, Japan, Korea and Southeast Asian countries. There are three main sects of Buddhism -- *Theravada*, which does not believe in a divine existence; *Mahayana*, which is believes in many gods; and *Vajrayana*. Buddhism believes in an afterlife, Nirvana, which is a state free from all suffering. The "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhism are 1. All life entails suffering; 2. Suffering is caused by desire and attachment; 3. Suffering can be eliminated; 4. Suffering is eliminated by following the teachings of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that one should not kill, should not steal, should not lie and should not use drugs or alcohol.

In the program "We Are All One," there are four scenes in which doctors try to cure a child stricken with a mysterious illness. Each scene represents one of many practices used by ancient Chinese (non-western) doctors:

- **Acupuncture** -- the use of needles inserted into the body to treat pain or other physical ailments.
- **Herbal medicine** -- the use of herbs and other naturally occurring substances to cure or control disease.
- **Moxibustion** -- burning a mugwort plant near an acupuncture point to boost the effects of acupuncture.
- **Cupping** -- using cups to create a vacuum on the skin to draw blood to a particular location in order to cure disease in the area.

In addition, traditional Chinese medicine employs breathing and other exercises, massage, and skin scraping to cure or control disease.

At one time, western doctors thought that ancient Chinese medical techniques were worthless. But now, there is an increased appreciation -- and use -- of some of these methods.

1. Who was the founder of Buddhism?
2. Name the three main sects of Buddhism.
3. Name four examples of ancient Chinese medicine.
Make Believe or Real?

Directions: Color the pictures. Then, on the line below each one, tell whether the picture shows something that could be real, or whether it is make believe.

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________
5. __________________________
6. __________________________
What Happened Next?

Directions: Six pictures from “We Are All One” are found below. Cut out the pictures and place them in the proper order, as the events took place in the story. Below each picture, tell what is happening.
Analyzing "We Are All One"

Directions: Analyze the folktale according to the story elements listed below. Be succinct.

Plot – Exposition:

Plot – Rising Action:

Plot – Climax:

Plot – Falling Action:

Plot – Resolution:

Conflict:

Theme:

Setting:

Characters:

Point of View:
Chinese Music

Much of the music heard in *We Are All One* was played on traditional Chinese musical instruments. Music -- and musical instruments -- vary in China depending on where it is played. While most traditional music comes from the Han ethnic group, there are also ethnic music forms from the Tibetans, Uyghurs (pronounced WE-gurz), Manchurs, Mongolians and others.

Han music is known as *heterophonic* music, meaning the musicians play a single melody. The music is very similar to the Chinese language because its tones slide from high to low and from low to high. There are no brass instruments such as trumpets in traditional Chinese music. But there are drums, flutes and stringed instruments. Some of the stringed instruments are played with a bow, others are plucked like a guitar or banjo.

One of the most popular forms of musical entertainment in the country is opera, including puppet opera, a ritual masked opera, Cantonese opera and Sichuan opera. In classical Chinese opera, the performers often sing in guttural, high-pitched tones and are accompanied by stringed instruments and percussion.

Today, all kinds of music are popular in China – ancient, modern, western pop, jazz and western classical. If you go on iTunes, you can hear a Chinese pop radio station, Chinamerica.
Guide writer Barri Golbus recently interviewed Warren Colman, the producer of *We Are All One*, to learn more about the program and its production.

**BG:** There are many Chinese folktales. Why did you select this one?

**WC:** I almost selected another story and then came upon this one at the last minute. It really had all the elements we look for -- a story kids would enjoy watching, one that addresses at least one cultural aspect of the country. It also had interesting, colorful characters.

**BG:** What struck you most about the story?

**WC:** Even from the title, it was easy to see that there could be a lot of discussion generated. What does it mean that "we are all one?" Is it really true? The other thing that struck me as I read it was, "Wow! This story is thousands of years old, and it demonstrates a really sophisticated knowledge of ecological interdependence, especially between humans and other animals."

**BG:** You mean between the peddler and the ants and caterpillar?

**WC:** Right, the peddler saves the ants and the ants do him a favor in return. They find the bead. He saves the caterpillar and the caterpillar returns the favor by telling him where to find the bead. And, of course, he saves the merchant's daughter and is rewarded by the merchant.

**BG:** That interdependence is based on a philosophy that when we help others, or those of another species, we help ourselves.

**WC:** Right. Today, we base that belief more on the science of ecology. But that belief has been a basic tenet of Buddhism for more than two thousand years. When doing my research, I found a great quote from Thich Nhat Hanh, a famous Buddhist monk who's also an author, poet and activist. He says, "Buddhism offers a vision of ... inter-identification -- a vision where all living beings are identified with all other entities. This vision does not merely teach that we are all in this together, but that we are all ... 'rising and falling as one living body'." I think this story really does exemplify that philosophy.

**BG:** And Buddhism is an important component of Chinese culture?

**WC:** Yes, it came to China from India about two thousand years ago. There have been times when it was outlawed, but it's survived and is an important thread in China's cultural fabric.
BG: I noticed that the ant queen compared the peddler to Emperor Yu. Who was he?

WC: Yu the Great was the founder of the Xia Dynasty, some 2,300 years ago. He's best known for teaching people how to stop the flow of rivers during an epic flood that lasted 13 years. It could be simply mythology, but Yu is considered a great hero in ancient Chinese history.

BG: Let's talk a little about the peddler. How would you describe his character?

WC: I would characterize the peddler as a person who appears to be a really, really nice guy. His wife would undoubtedly say that he was too nice for his own good.

BG: He gives away his candy.

WC: And as a result, his kids go hungry. It's a theme one often sees in the folktale world: the clueless husband and the suffering wife who has to balance the household budget.

BG: Let's talk about the idea of selflessness. To what degree does the peddler exhibit that quality?

WC: That's an interesting question because on first blush, he seems to be completely selfless. But on deeper reflection, one has to wonder. After all, his children suffer because he gives away his candy and he really doesn't try to find the bead out of altruism. He's in it for the money. I think this is a really good lesson: my guess is that most kids would say that he's very kind, very selfless. On the surface, that's his character. But beneath the surface, it's another story.

BG: But he's in it for the money so his family can escape its poverty, right?

WC: Maybe, but there's nothing in the story to really indicate that. It's true that in the end the family is in a much better place financially, but that may be due to the peddler's wife handling the money, not him. It could be that he's doing it for the recognition in the community or some other reason. Who knows? An interesting question would be whether he would try to find the bead if there wasn't a reward offered.
BG: I'm guessing he would because he did gather leaves for the caterpillar and there would be no communal recognition for that act of kindness. On to another topic: there are many periods in Chinese history. In which period did you set the story?

WC: The story was set in the early T'ang dynasty, around 580 AD.

BG: When you say, "set in the early T'ang dynasty" what exactly do you mean?

WC: The clothing, architecture and artifacts seen in the production.

BG: Why then?

WC: Along with the Sui Dynasty, it was the earliest stage of what's referred to as "Classical Imperial China," which was, for the most part, a very productive period of ancient Chinese history -- in agriculture, the arts, governmental administration, etc. We set it early in the T'ang Dynasty because later in the period Buddhism was outlawed.

BG: Getting back to ecological interdependence for a minute, something just occurred to me. If the peddler truly understood interdependence, he wouldn't have chased away the bird. The bird, after all, is part of the food chain and as such should be able to eat the caterpillar.

WC: That's a very good point, and another indication that the peddler isn't necessarily the hero of this story.

BG: Maybe a flawed hero?

WC: I think that's right.

BG: Okay, let's move on to the production of the program for a minute. I thought that was some really good acting in this program. Was it hard to find actors who could do a Chinese accent?

WC: What we found is that there are many different Chinese accents, and invariably each was extremely difficult to understand. So what we aimed for was a kind of thin, generic Chinese accent. I think the cast did a great job. That was one of the most enjoyable aspects of producing this program -- working with such accomplished actors. David Darlow, the narrator and one of Chicago's most
respected stage actors, also has appeared in many feature films and television programs as a featured player and narrated another program in this series, "Ivan and the Firebird." Francis Guinan, the peddler, is another highly respected stage and screen actor. He recently appeared in a lead role on Broadway in the Tony and Pulitzer prize-winning play, "August: Osage County," and won the drama desk award for another Broadway role in "The Grapes of Wrath." Tim Dadabo has starred in an animated series on Fox and is Speedy Gonzales in the new Warner Brothers cartoon series. He's also a star of many electronic games and with his incredible range, plays the caterpillar, the ant captain, and the merchant's gate keeper. Illysa Fradin, who plays the peddler's wife and the ant queen, has had a recurring role on NBC's E.R. and does a lot of national TV spots, both on-camera and voiceover.

BG: As you know, this is the fifth program I've interviewed you about, and by now I know that you add what I call "conceptual enhancements" that could be easily overlooked. In the second dream sequence, the audience hears "She will be healed..." three times as the peddler swims through that beautiful watery landscape. The third time, two voices instead of a single voice, are heard reciting the line. Why is that?

WC: The line is a foreshadowing device, of course. The first two times the voice is heard, we see only the peddler. The third time, we see both the peddler and the caterpillar. The line is the same, but is spoken at slightly different times, underscoring both individuality and being part of something greater. This is a way to underscore the paradoxical duality of oneness. We are individuals, of course. But we're also part of a single, cosmic whole, according to traditional Buddhist beliefs.

BG: Which is represented by the caterpillar.

WC: Right.