

## Nomad Girl

### A Lesson for Students

Buddhism is a belief system that originated in India. Some Buddhists believe in bodhisattvas and gods and goddesses while other Buddhists do not. Tara is the Buddhist goddess of universal compassion. Like impermanence, compassion is an important tenet in Buddhist thought. Some Buddhists believe that Tara can help followers, especially in difficult times. In the Seeing issue of Parabola magazine, Barbara Helen Berger shares a Tibetan Buddhist story about the goddess Tara entitled “Nomad Girl.” In the following Parabola in the Classroom lesson, students will read Ms. Berger’s retelling of this Tibetan Buddhist story and answer questions. The questions are designed to help students address the critical points of the article as well as to serve as a basis for further critical thinking, discussion, and reflection. Students will also be able to identify and explain aspects of Buddhist beliefs and analyze the role of Tara in Buddhist thought. Through the sharing of a story, a cultural lens is opened that allows the reader to gain insight into another culture.



**Pre-reading Questions**

1. Before analyzing the article, write four facts about Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, from History class, a textbook, or an encyclopedia
  
2. List the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.
  
3. Identify the eight actions of the Noble Eightfold Path.
  
4. Define the term: Bodhisattva.
  
5. Define the term: Impermanence.
  
6. Define the term: Compassion.
  
7. List four facts about Tibet.
  
8. List four facts about Tibetan Buddhism.
  
9. Define the Tibetan word: Lama

10. Is Tibetan Buddhism a form of Theravada Buddhism or Mahayana Buddhism?
11. What is the primary difference between Theravada Buddhism and Mahayana Buddhism?
12. Who is the Dalai Lama?

**Questions for the Reading:**

13. What did Tara do before she became the divine lady Tara?
14. What did the monks tell Tara?
15. What did Tara have to do, according to the monks, to attain enlightenment?
16. How did Tara respond to the monks?
17. What vow did Tara make?
18. What happened to a traveler one day high on a mountain plateau?

19. Why does the storyteller emphasize that a bitter wind swept over the traveler?  
What is the bitter wind indicative of?
  
20. What stirred the traveler to wake?
  
21. How did the girl help the traveler?
  
22. Where did the girl take the traveler?
  
23. How did the girl help the traveler regain his strength?
  
24. What did the girl do early each morning?
  
25. Describe the girl's daily activities.
  
26. As the man grew stronger, how did he spend his evenings?
  
27. What did the girl give the traveler when he was well enough to be on his way?
  
28. What did the traveler give the girl when he was well enough to be on his way?

29. What did the traveler feel when he was well enough to be on his way?
30. When he was not far along on his way, what did the traveler see when he turned for his last glimpse of the girl's tent?
31. How did the traveler explain what he saw
32. What concerned the traveler when he turned for his last glimpse of the girl's tent?
33. Why did the traveler begin to think that his experience was strange?
34. Why did the bag the girl gave the traveler also seem strange?
35. Who did the traveler visit to help make sense of his experience?
36. What did the lama tell the traveler?
37. What did the traveler wish he had done upon learning of the girl's true identity?
38. What did the lama encourage the man to do in order to possibly see Tara again?

39. What did the lama teach the traveler to do?
  
40. What did the traveler pray for?
  
41. What began to happen to the traveler?
  
42. Where did the traveler begin to see Tara?
  
43. How did the traveler change?
  
44. What did the lama say about the traveler's change?
  
45. What did the traveler feel upon hearing the lama's words?

### **Take it to the Web**

Tara is a beloved goddess in Tibetan Buddhism, a goddess frequently depicted in Tibetan art. Find several images of Tara. Draw your own image of Tara on a poster board. Surround the image of Tara with facts about Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. Create beauty and provide information for all travelers to your classroom.

*“Teach this triple truth to all:*

*A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion  
are the things which renew humanity.” ~ Buddha*