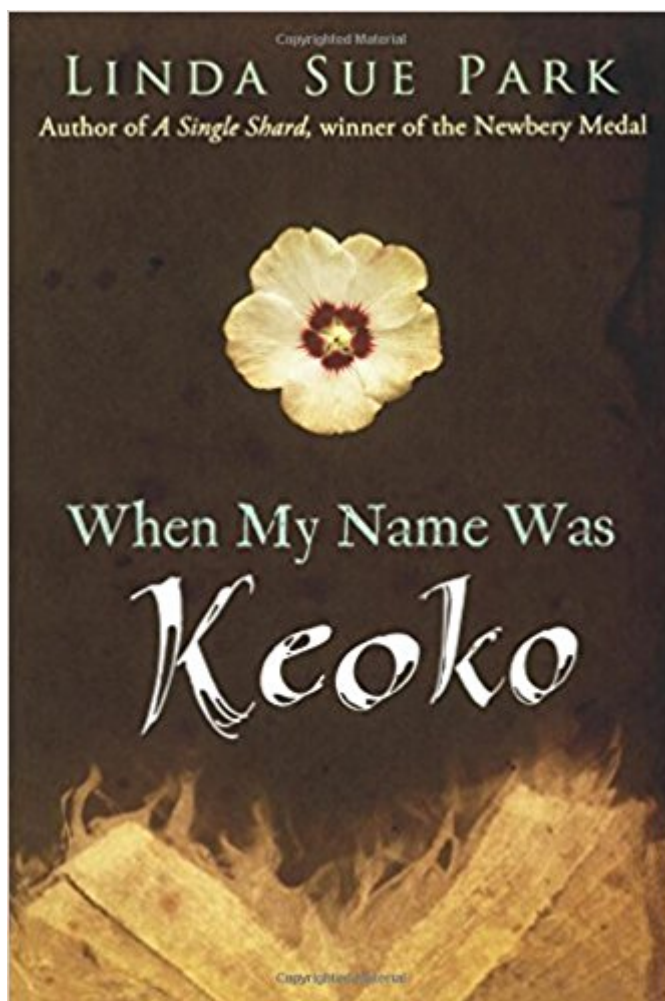


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When My Name Was Keoko



Synopsis

Sun-hee and her older brother, Tae-yul, live in Korea with their parents. Because Korea is under Japanese occupation, the children study Japanese and speak it at school. Their own language, their flag, the folktales Uncle tells them—even their names—are all part of the Korean culture that is now forbidden. When World War II comes to Korea, Sun-hee is surprised that the Japanese expect their Korean subjects to fight on their side. But the greatest shock of all comes when Tae-yul enlists in the Japanese army in an attempt to protect Uncle, who is suspected of aiding the Korean resistance. Sun-hee stays behind, entrusted with the life-and-death secrets of a family at war.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

Customer Reviews

Inspired by her own family's stories of living in South Korea during the Japanese occupation in the years preceding World War II, Newbery Medal-winning author Linda Sue Park chronicles the compelling story of two siblings, 10-year-old Sun-hee and 13-year-old Tae-yul, and their battle to maintain their identity and dignity during one of Korea's most difficult and turbulent times. In alternating first-person chapters, they relate their family's troubles under the strict fascist regime. The Kim family is stripped of their cultural symbols, only permitted to learn Japanese history and

language, and forced to convert their names to Japanese. Sun-hee, now Keoko, struggles to reconcile her Korean home life with her Japanese school and friends, while Tae-yul, now Nobuo, attempts to convert his growing anger into a more positive passion for flight and airplanes. Both are worried for their uncle, whom they discover is printing an underground Korean resistance paper. When Sun-hee inadvertently puts her uncle's life in danger, she sets in motion a chain of events that results in her brother volunteering as a pilot for the Japanese near the end of WWII. While Sun-hee and her parents wait in breathless uncertainty to hear from Tae-yul, the war rushes to a close, leaving Korea's destiny hanging in the balance. This well-researched historical novel is accompanied by a thoughtful author's note that explains what happened to Korea and families like the Kims after WWII and a bibliography to entice interested young readers into learning more about a topic largely unknown to American audiences. (Ages 10 to 14) --Jennifer Hubert --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A brother and sister alternate as narrators in Newbery Medalist Park's (A Single Shard) well-constructed novel, which takes place from 1940-1945 in Japanese-occupied Korea. The Japanese government forbids the Korean language to be spoken and the country's flag to be flown, and even forces Korean families like Tae-yul and Sun-hee's to change their names (Sun-hee becomes Keoko). Through the use of the shifting narrators, Park subtly points up the differences between male and female roles in Korean society; and the father's process of choosing the family's Japanese name speaks volumes about his strength and intelligence. As the war intensifies, each family member asserts his or her individuality, from Sun-hee, who continues to keep a journal after a soldier calls it "a crime against our Divine Emperor," to her uncle, who prints a revolutionary newspaper in hiding, to Tae-yul, who joins the Japanese army to avoid helping the military police capture his uncle only to be chosen as a kamikaze pilot. The son comes to an understanding of his father rather abruptly at the novel's close, and some readers may wonder why Tae-yul was not labeled a chin-il-pa ("lover of Japan"). But, in the end, telling details provide a clear picture of Sun-hee and Tae-yul and their world. Readers will come away with an appreciation of this period of history and likely a greater interest in learning more about it. Ages 10-14. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I purchased the book for my grandchildren but read it first so we could discuss it after they had read it. I think they will enjoy the story; it is easy to read and is told in both the sister and brother's voices in each chapter. It provides a good, easy to understand, if limited, idea of Korea prior to and during

WWII. Courage is portrayed in different ways by all the characters and will provide many opportunities to discuss with your young reader the meaning of courage, family unity, obligations to family and community and how easy it is to misunderstand someone and their intentions if we rely only on our assumption of them.

The story in the novel is good, following two young Korean children during the time of the Japanese invasion and subsequent occupation of the peninsula. The innocence in their voices, when describing events that you know what they amount to, but are fully out of reach from their almost pure minds, is shivering and at times haunting. It is a "don't forget" testimony to the horrors of war, but still a more positive perspective than one that can be gathered from those who knew nothing but suffering, or even those who even didn't make it. The only reason for not giving it 5 stars, as stated in the title, is that I found the novel quite short, and I wish more details, something that would give us a better understanding of the characters, was given, in essence, to make the story deeper. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, and that's just my opinion, so I'd still recommend it to anyone interested in Korea, WW 2, or a children's tale of endurance during hard times.

This is the story of five years in the life of a Korean family during the Japanese occupation of their homeland at the beginning of WWII. They were determined to maintain their Korean identity under the noses of the Japanese soldiers who intended to destroy their nation. All Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names--hence the title: Kim Sun-hee became Keoko during this time. Set in Korea from 1940 to 1945, the story is told alternately by the 10-year old daughter and her 13 year old brother. There are elements of stifled celebration, pathos, great courage, suspense and a satisfying ending. The author's note is informative. Portions of the story come from her own family, and she recounts other examples of Japanese domination of the Korean people. She also includes a bibliography for further reading. I really liked the book (and I am an old lady!). It's a piece of history that I knew nothing about--I have the impression that the Japanese were trying to do to Korea what Germany tried to do to the Jews! It's worthwhile reading for higher elementary grades and above.

We love this book! It is a must read.

Though I was never interested in Korea, I decided to purchase this book out of curiosity. I was born in Korea and actually attended Korean school for years, yet I lost all interest in things of Korea except it's food. Ms Park's "When My Name Was Keoko" has strongly awakened my interest in Korea

somewhat. I have to say , I had hard time putting this book down and stayed up until wee hour of the morning to finish it. I heartily recommend it!!!

When My Name Was Keoko by Linda Sue Park was an enlightening journey to understanding the vulnerabilities of the Koreans during the struggle of power and peace during 1935-1945. I am so glad I read this book....now I will spend time digesting then sharing this book with others.

Great novel for everyone. I enjoyed this book, I used it in a classroom. Has many themes that can be used in classrooms.

I'd recommend this for somewhat older readers than most of Linda Sue Park's other juvenile novels. The Japanese are enemies of Korea in WWII, overlords and polite pillagers of the people, and the interactions of an intimate yet traditional Korean family with the Japanese soldiers and civilians can fuel anger and resentment toward "Japan," even these many years later. On the other hand, it did an excellent job of showing me why some of my Korean students have background animosity towards some of my Japanese students. I read six of Linda Sue Park's YA novels this summer. They were excellent stories and taught me much. I appreciated When My Mame Was Keoko as among my favorites.

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