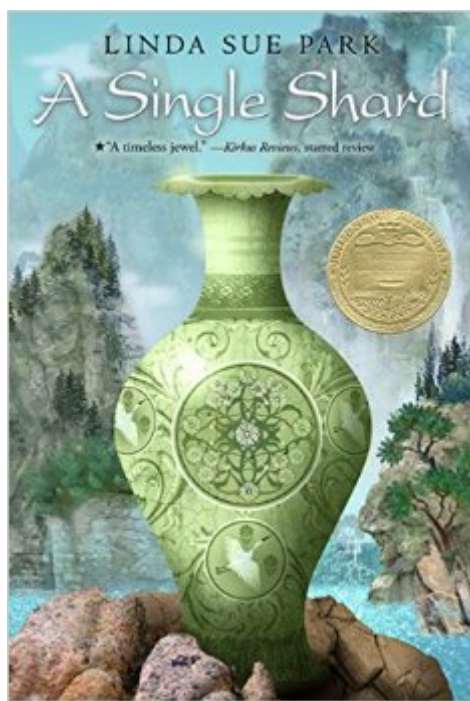


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A Single Shard



Synopsis

In this Newbery Medal-winning book set in 12th century Korea, Tree-ear, a 13-year-old orphan, lives under a bridge in Châ™ulpâ™o, a potters' village famed for delicate celadon ware. He has become fascinated with the potterâ™s craft; he wants nothing more than to watch master potter Min at work, and he dreams of making a pot of his own someday. When Min takes Tree-ear on as his helper, Tree-ear is elated â™ until he finds obstacles in his path: the backbreaking labor of digging and hauling clay, Minâ™s irascible temper, and his own ignorance. But Tree-ear is determined to prove himself â™ even if it means taking a long, solitary journey on foot to present Minâ™s work in the hope of a royal commission . . . even if it means arriving at the royal court with nothing to show but a single celadon shard.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

Customer Reviews

As a Korean person, I'm quite familiar with the orphan story tradition that exists in Korean culture and literature. When I was a kid, my parents told me they picked me up under a bridge when they wanted to chide me for some mischief, and I used to cry. It may sound strange to westerners, but the 'orphan under a bridge' is a familiar archetypal story that's been passed on through generations through oral storytelling as well as narrative ones. Korea is a country that's been through countless attacks and subjugations by other countries and empires, and the possibility that a child could suffer

the plight of being an 'orphan under the bridge' strikes a particular chord of fear and pity for the Koreans. Linda Sue Park does a fabulous job of taking this traditional Korean story module as a catalyst for a well-developed tale of triumph of a boy who shouldn't have overcome the odds but did. Placing the protagonist boy in 12th century Korea was a shrewd move, as it was the era when Korean art was deemed to be in its apex, especially its pottery. As we follow Tree Ear, the hero of the book, trying to overcome many obstacles to become the master potter, we also become aware of the rich culture and tradition of an exotic land. It's a tribute to Ms. Park that she does this without sentimentalizing and 'orientalising' the world that she depicts. (Although I question the translation of the boy's name into 'Tree Ear', à la Amy Tan) We only get a deeply moving tale, a bildungsroman of a boy who came into his own despite the odds. It's a common story structure, but it works unfailingly through Ms. Park's convincing and inspired narrative and the previously uncharted terrain of 12th century Korea. Very well done. Get this book for your kids but steal it away from them at night when they're sleeping and read it yourself.

A short time ago I wrote about how I find the Booker Prize to be one of the few awards that consistently recognizes truly excellent books. The other award that I think does as well is the Newbery Medal. As always, there is varying quality even among the winners of this award but I found this book to be one of the best of the best. First of all, I always appreciate books that take me to places I've never been. Certainly, this story of twelfth century Korea does that. Additionally, it describes various processes of pottery-making, something else with which I was not very familiar. Most importantly, however, this is a story filled with wonderful characters. Tree-ear is an orphan who lives beneath a bridge with an old man named Crane-man. Slowly, Tree-ear works his way into the family of a master potter, Min & his wife, by doing work which the old potter now finds difficult. Ultimately, Tree-ear is sent on a long journey to the capital with a sample of Min's work to obtain a royal commission but, when the samples are destroyed along the way, he can only take a shard of the former pottery to the commissioner. This is a beautiful story which is well worth reading--and that includes any "adults" who might be reading this. Remember, if you can't read a "children's book" and enjoy it, then your child should probably not be reading it either.

I am 12 years old, and I liked this book a lot. Once I started reading it, I couldn't stop. I ended up finishing it in about an hour and fifteen minutes. Even though the plot is very simple, there's a lot of messages inside of it. It is similar to the box that Tree-Ear finds that is simple on the outside, but inside it has many other boxes in a complex layout. For example, when the potter Min's wife

discovers Tree-Ear is saving the lunch he receives from her, she refills his bowl even when he hides it. When Tree-Ear finds the re-filled bowl, instead of being greedy the next day and eating the whole thing because he knows it will be refilled, he only eats half. Tree-Ear and Crane-Man don't have much, but they are thankful for the little that they do have. I think this book is a very good book for children, and I think it deserved to win the Newbery award.

There is a boy named Tree-ear who is best friends with a man named Crane-man. They together live under a bridge on the outer edge of the village near the forest where he watches master potter Min creating beautiful pieces of pottery. He wishes to become like Min and so becomes Min's apprentice. After a long time of just being apprentice, Min sends Tree-ear on a very important journey to the king's court to deliver pottery. When Tree-ear returns, he finds Crane-man has passed away and Min decides to take him in as his adoptive son. I also like this part of the book because this is when Min realizes how he really missed having a child to love and look after, after the passing on of his young son. He finally realizes that he should take in Tree-ear as his own. I liked this book a lot because it talked of the Korean culture in a way that everyone could understand. Also it struck me very deep at heart when Tree-ear, finally coming within a hair's breath of fulfilling his dreams finds out that his closest friend who helped him get there, Crane-man has passed on. I also like this book because of the great detail it goes into to describe the procedures for making pottery. This book takes you so smoothly through different emotions that you won't even know when you're crying or laughing, you'll just know that you're having a good time reading the book. My favorite part of the book is when Tree-ear returns to find that Crane-man has passed on, and Master Min tells Tree-ear that Crane-man would not let go of the mini monkey he made. I think it's very touching to know that even when your greatest friend and family is not forgetting you even at the verge of death and after they have passed on.

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