

# BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

## thematic connections

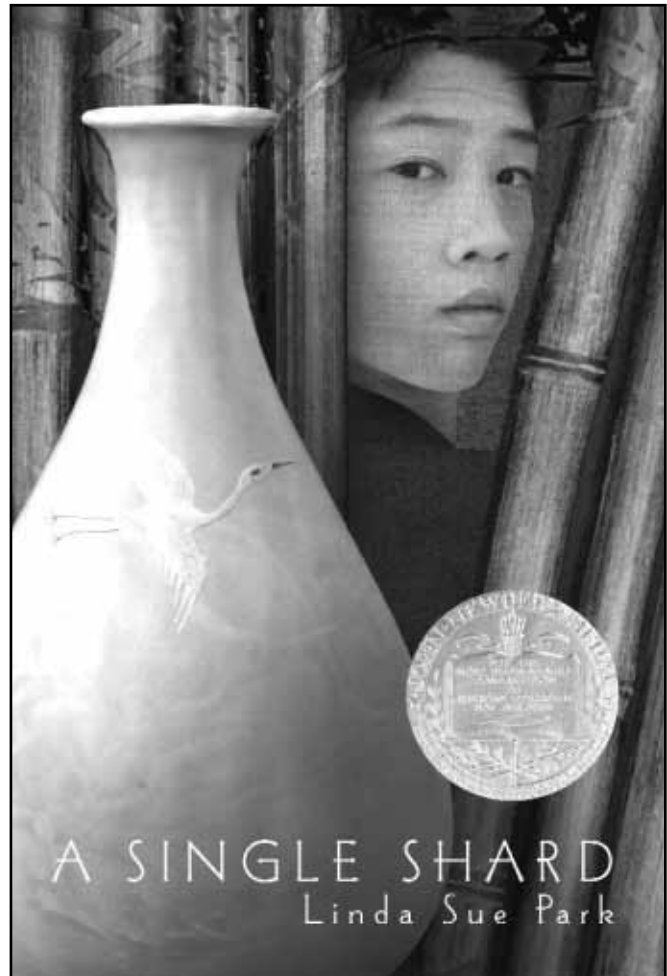
**Courage • Survival • Honesty  
Hope • Family • Death**

**Grades 4–8**

## about the book

**A 12-year-old orphan in 12th-century Korea is transformed from an apprentice to an artist in this heartwarming story about courage, survival, and the power of fine art.**

Tree-ear, an orphan boy, and his elderly and lame companion, Crane-man, live under a bridge in the small potters' village of Ch'ul'po. Though homeless and hungry, Crane-man has taught Tree-ear survival skills and values like courage, honesty, and hard work. When Tree-ear accidentally destroys a piece of pottery created by Min, the best potter in the village, he willingly pays his debt by working for the artist. Tree-ear's greatest hope is to learn from Min and to someday create pottery with his own hands. Though Min ignores Tree-ear, the boy remains loyal and offers to deliver Min's work to the royal court in Songdo. Along the way, Tree-ear is robbed and the pottery is shattered, but Tree-ear is so sure that Min's work is worthy of a royal commission that he continues his journey and delivers but a single shard.



Dell Yearling paperback • 0-440-41851-8

## awards

2002 Newbery Medal Winner

An ALA Notable Book

An ALA Best Book for Young Adults

*A School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year

*A Booklist* Editors' Choice

Visit Teachers @ Random at [www.randomhouse.com/teachers](http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers)

## pre-reading activity

Take the class on a virtual field trip to the Arts of Korea Gallery at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. (See the Web address in the “Internet Resources” section.) Ask them to pay particular attention to the celadon pottery and to take note of the special qualities of the pieces. Have the students describe the pottery in class, and then compare their

descriptions to the one in the author’s note (p. 149).



## thematic connections

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**Courage**—Ask students to discuss the courage it takes for Tree-ear to approach Min about working for him. How does Crane-man help Tree-ear maintain his courage? When Crane-man tells the story of “The Rock of the Fallen Flowers,” he says to Tree-ear, “Leaping into death is not the only way to show courage.” (p. 117) How does it take courage for Tree-ear to choose life over death when he is robbed? How does it take courage to face Min after the robbery?

**Survival**—Crane-man tells Tree-ear, “Scholars read the great words of the world. But you and I must learn to read the world itself.” (p. 7) Discuss how these words relate to survival. Ask students to point out the many ways that Tree-ear learns to “read the world.” How does the ability to survive contribute to his persistence to work and learn from Min?

**Honesty**—Ask students to discuss how Crane-man instills honesty in Tree-ear. Discuss Crane-man’s statement, “Work gives a man dignity, stealing takes it away.” (p. 6) Tree-ear wonders if it’s stealing to take another person’s idea. Engage the class in a debate about this issue, touching on the protection of one’s ideas through copyrights and patents. How does Tree-ear learn that a “good deed balance[s] a bad one”? (p. 6) Why do you think Min questions Tree-ear’s honesty when Tree-ear first approaches him about work? At what point does he realize that he can trust Tree-ear?

**Hope**—Tree-ear’s greatest hope is to make a pot and to learn from Min, the greatest potter in the village. Discuss the moments in the novel when Tree-ear’s dream seems almost hopeless. How does his hope parallel his courage? Crane-man says, “My friend, the same wind that blows one door shut often blows another open.” (p. 97) Discuss the doors that are opened to Tree-ear by the end of the novel.

**Family**—Both Crane-man and Tree-ear are homeless. Discuss the father-son relationship that develops between the two. Min is quick to tell Tree-ear, “You are not my son.” (p. 95) Contrast Min’s feelings toward Tree-ear to his wife’s feelings for the boy. At what point does Min begin to feel differently toward Tree-ear? Min and his wife give Tree-ear the name Hyun-pil, which shares a syllable from the name of their late son. (p. 147) Discuss the significance of this name. How has Tree-ear been a son to Min all along?

**Death**—Ask students to cite evidence that Min is still grieving for his son. How does Tree-ear indirectly help Min work through his grief? Discuss how Tree-ear deals with Crane-man’s death at the end of the novel. Talking about a person’s life is often helpful in dealing with their death. What might Tree-ear tell Min and Ajima about Crane-man?

# connecting to the curriculum

**Language Arts**—Park uses similes to create certain images. For example, “The curt words swept over Tree-ear like cool rain over a parched field” and “Tree-ear wore mud like a second shirt.” (pp. 30 & 33) Ask students to rewrite each sentence without the simile. How do the images change? Then have them find other similes in the novel.

Tell students that a brief biographical sketch of the artist often accompanies an exhibited work of art. Ask students to write a biographical sketch of Min that is displayed with his pottery in the Royal palace. Ask them to include a short tribute to Tree-ear for delivering the single shard that won Min the royal commission.

**Social Studies**—Buddhism was strong during the Koryo dynasty. Send students to the library to research Buddhist beliefs. Then ask them to write a short paper discussing how the values that Crane-man instills in Tree-ear represent these beliefs. Ask students to use books in the library or sites on the Internet to research Korean culture from the Koryo dynasty to the present. Then ask them to construct an illustrated time line that reveals the contribution of the Korean people to the arts. Students may also want to find out the many museums in Korea where visitors may view works of Korean art.

**Science**—Min uses a communal kiln to fire his pottery. How does the heat of the kiln affect the outcome of the pottery? Have students research the construction of older kilns and compare to the design of modern kilns. How has science and technology changed the way modern artisans work? Then ask students to write and illustrate a brief booklet called “The Science of Pottery.”

**Art**—The cherry blossom, orchid, chrysanthemum, and bamboo are considered “noble plants” in Korea and were often used in ink and brush paintings during the Koryo dynasty. Display pictures of these flowers and plants, and ask students to select one to paint using ink and brush.

**Music**—Music has been an important element of Korean culture since ancient times. *P'ansori* is a type of Korean folk song similar to a ballad that tells a long, narrative story and is often recited or sung, accompanied by a drummer. Discuss the elements of a ballad. Then ask students to write a *P'ansori* about Tree-ear's life, beginning with his birth and ending when he becomes a part of Min's family.

## vocabulary/ use of language

The vocabulary in the book provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore new words and their meanings. Ask students to keep a vocabulary journal of unfamiliar words and try to define them from the context of the story. Such words may include: *oblivious* (p. 4), *insolence* (p. 30), *felicitous* (p. 41), *derision* (p. 46), *arduous* (p. 53), *invective* (p. 66), *lugubrious* (p. 72), *plaintive* (p. 81), *noxious* (p. 88), *trepidation* (p. 109), *pinioned* (p. 123), *skepticism* (p. 138), and *barrage* (p. 144).

## related titles

### by theme

#### **Gathering Blue**

**Lois Lowry**

Courage · Survival · Hope  
Death · Art

Grades 5 up / 0-440-22949-9  
Dell Laurel-Leaf Readers Circle

#### **The Friends**

**Kazumi Yumoto**

Family · Death  
Cultural Diversity

Grades 5 up / 0-440-41446-6  
Dell Yearling

#### **Mieko and the Fifth Treasure**

**Eleanor Coerr**

Hope · Art · Cultural Diversity  
Grades 2–6 / 0-440-40947-0  
Dell Yearling

#### **Year of Impossible Goodbyes**

**Sook Nyul Choi**

Courage · Survival · Hope  
Family · Cultural Diversity  
Grades 5 up / 0-440-40759-1  
Dell Yearling



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## about the author

**Linda Sue Park**, the daughter of Korean immigrants, was born and reared in Illinois. She has always enjoyed reading and has been writing poems and stories since she was four years old. Her first novel, *Seesaw Girl*, was published in 1999; *The Kite Fighters* followed the next year. In 2002, her third novel, *A Single Shard*, received the prestigious Newbery Medal. Her most recent book is *When My Name Was Keoko: A Novel of Korea in World War II*. In addition to these novels, she has published poems and short fiction for adults. Ms. Park and her family live in upstate New York.

## internet resources

#### **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**

[www.metmuseum.org/explore/korea/gallery.html](http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/korea/gallery.html)  
An exhibit of Korean art, including celadon pottery.

#### **KoreaInfogate**

[www.koreainfogate.com/beautykorea/special/celadon.asp](http://www.koreainfogate.com/beautykorea/special/celadon.asp)  
This site provides a picture of celadon pottery.

#### **Linda Sue Park**

[www.lindasuepark.com](http://www.lindasuepark.com)  
This is the official Web site for Linda Sue Park.

## on the web

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