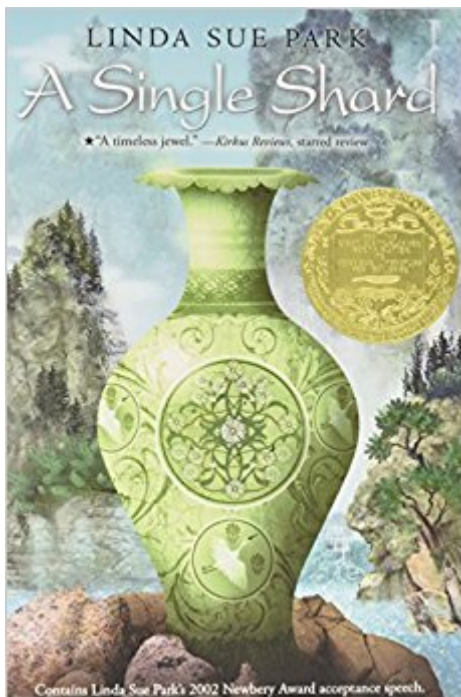


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A Single Shard



Synopsis

In this Newbery Medal-winning book set in 12th century Korea, Tree-ear, a 13-year-old orphan, lives under a bridge in Ch'ul'po, a potters' village famed for delicate celadon ware. He has become fascinated with the potter'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 until he finds obstacles in his path: the backbreaking labor of digging and hauling clay, Min's irascible temper, and his own ignorance. But Tree-ear is determined to prove himself even if it means taking a long, solitary journey on foot to present Min'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

Park (Seesaw Girl) molds a moving tribute to perseverance and creativity in this finely etched novel set in mid- to late 12th-century Korea. In Ch'ul'po, a potter's village, Crane-man (so called because of one shriveled leg) raises 10-year-old orphan Tree Ear (named for a mushroom that grows "without benefit of parent-seed"). Though the pair reside under a bridge, surviving on cast-off rubbish and fallen grains of rice, they believe "stealing and begging... made a man no better than a dog." From afar, Tree Ear admires the work of the potters until he accidentally destroys a piece by

Min, the most talented of the town's craftsmen, and pays his debt in servitude for nine days. Park convincingly conveys how a community of artists works (chopping wood for a communal kiln, cutting clay to be thrown, etc.) and effectively builds the relationships between characters through their actions (e.g., Tree Ear hides half his lunch each day for Crane-man, and Min's soft-hearted wife surreptitiously fills the bowl). She charts Tree Ear's transformation from apprentice to artist and portrays his selflessness during a pilgrimage to Songdo to show Min's work to the royal court he faithfully continues even after robbers shatter the work and he has only a single shard to show. Readers will not soon forget these characters or their sacrifices. Ages 10-14. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Gr 5-8-In this tale of courage and devotion, a single shard from a celadon vase changes the life of a young boy and his master. In 12th-century Korea, the village of Ch'ulp'o is famous for its pottery. The orphan Tree-ear spends his days foraging for food for himself and Crane-man, a lame straw weaver who has cared for him for many years. Because of his wanderings, Tree-ear is familiar with all of the potters in the village, but he is especially drawn to Min. When he drops a piece Min has made, Tree-ear begins to work for him to pay off his debt, but stays on after the debt is paid because he longs to learn to create beautiful pots himself. Sent to the royal court to show the king's emissary some new pottery, Tree-ear makes a long journey filled with disaster and learns what it means to have true courage. This quiet story is rich in the details of life in Korea during this period. In addition it gives a full picture of the painstaking process needed to produce celadon pottery. However, what truly stands out are the characters: the grumpy perfectionist, Min; his kind wife; wise Crane-man; and most of all, Tree-ear, whose determination and lively intelligence result in good fortune. Like Park's Seesaw Girl (1999) and The Kite Fighters (2000, both Clarion), this book not only gives readers insight into an unfamiliar time and place, but it is also a great story.-Barbara Scotto, Michael Driscoll School, Brookline, MA Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I bought this because my fifth grade grand son had to read it for school and he was telling me about the story. I'm a potter and we decided to share the story. This is well written with decent character development and a clear story arc. The factual information about pottery and the making of pottery is accurate and worked gracefully into the story line. The plot involves a young boy in ancient times who is trying to find his way through life as an orphan. He stumbles upon a community

of master potters and becomes interested in their processes. The boy gets hired to do chores for one of the best potters, and finds a way to help his master vie for a place on the emperor's potting commission. It's an adventure, a story about building your self esteem and your skills, and a great story about commitment to others. I recommend this YA story for any age.

As a parent who is thinking of this book in terms of what it would do for my son, I must say that there is quite a bit:1. It's an interesting twist on a very old theme (the bildungsroman)2. It has a lot of topics for further discussiona. The history of Korea (multiple invasions, provincialism, and such);b. A lot of good sayings to analyze and for further discussion ("Scholars read the great words of the world. But you and I must learn to read the world itself.")c. Some good words to help build a youngster's vocabulary (spoor, celadon, lugubrious, kiln, slip)d. Morals about life (What lesson could a child draw from Tree-ear's bad experience with the thieves and then his later good experience with the commissioner? What could a child learn about the *way* that Tree-ear went about learning the craft of pottery? What about the way that he was aware of his surroundings?)e. Introduction of the concept of "intellectual property."3. There is a good afterword that explains the historical context of the book (that may have been more for adults, but it was only a couple of pages long and so it wouldn't kill a reasonably intelligent child to try to read it).4. The characterizations/ character development are very good. They are good at a level that both children AND adults can understand.The whole book only takes about 3 hours to read (I read the whole thing in one afternoon at work while being forced to hold office hours) and the writing is so interesting that it's hard to put down.Verdict: Worth the time. Worth the Kindle purchase price. Highly recommended.

My children and I just finished listening to the audio CD in the car. We truly enjoyed this story. The first chapter or two, I wasn't so sure if this story was going to be captivating or just an okay read. Well, it was more than okay - it was beautiful. So many others have written about the story-line, so I will just review the audiobook. I give the narrator, Graeme Malcolm, 5 stars as well. He did a wonderful job telling this story. His British accent was easily understood and somehow added to our being transported there. It was just perfect.My 10-year old daughter commented that the author's descriptions of the pottery were one of her favorite parts of the story. She loved imagining the designs and the colors. That, my friends, is why we read books!

It seems to me that Park's books are written much like fables, with each chapter, each episode drawn with poignant but concise brush strokes. Sometimes, as with "Long Walk to Water," this

doesn't work too well; there just isn't enough in whole to support full-blooded characters. Here, this writing style serves her - and all of us - excellently. As elsewhere, she dips in, she dips out. But here, with each emersion, she beautifully captures the essence of the time (so long ago!), the place (so mysterious and yet intimate), the story (plenty captivating) and most of all, the characters, especially Tree-ear. In about a hundred and fifty pages, she brings them all so fully alive and compelling. This is only one young man from a remote village on the other side of the earth, some 900 years ago. In a world where we might easily wonder if anything we ever do has any impact at all, we can see through this brief but powerful story that even in the smallest niche in time, the courage and perseverance and faith of a single person - without magic or histrionics - can truly make a difference. The story truly advances the Eastern philosophy that there are consequences to each and every act (each shard?) of man. I love this story at every level.

Read this aloud to my 8 & 10 year old sons. Well written, a great look at 12th century Korea. Inspired my boys to want to see pottery of that era, to attempt some pottery making of their own. Led to some great conversations about humility, perseverance, and pursuing excellence and keeping one's word.

Author Linda Sue Park has created a wonderful, moving middle grade novel with "A Single Shard". It is truly a worthy recipient of the Newbery medal. Though the story starts out at a somewhat plodding pace, Park has such a remarkable knack with words and storytelling, she can make even the mundane become engaging. Soon enough, I was drawn into the life of protagonist Tree-ear and the strange, faraway world that he lives within (12th century Korea). Through his struggles, his hard work, and his eternal optimism, Tree-ear was a character that I quickly grew to empathize and care for. Much like "Edward Tulane" (another book I recently read), Tree-ear's long journey is truly miraculous. Despite the long-past, foreign setting, I feel that most middle grade readers will be drawn into this story. Adults looking for a quick, interesting read will also be entertained, provided they like children's literature. To quote the novel, "There were some things that could not be molded into words", but by reading the work of Linda Sue Park, there would seem to be few things that the author cannot achieve with her gifted pen.

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