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Weedflower



Synopsis

FOR USE IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES ONLY. When Pearl Harbor is attacked, the lives of a Japanese-American girl and her family are thrown into chaos. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Full-disclosure time. I did not like "Kira-Kira". I respected what author Cynthia Kadohata was trying to do and I understood where she was trying to take her book but I did not respect how she did it. So when a co-worker I trust handed me, "Weedflower" and said, "It's actually good", I eyed the title with a critical eye. It takes a very extraordinary book to lift me out of my own personal prejudices and win me BACK over to a writer. That said, it seems that Kadohata has written such a book. Insightful, intelligent, historically accurate, and chock full of well-timed and well-written little tidbits, I've not found myself wanting to keep reading and reading a children's book this good in quite some time. Undoubtedly one of this year's rare can't-miss titles. Sumiko is just thrilled. She's just been invited to her very first birthday party with all the other children in her class. Though she lives in California on her aunt and uncle's flower farm, Sumiko doesn't know a lot of other Japanese-American children at her school. When she arrives at the party, however, the mother of the birthday girl turns her away from the house. Not long after this humiliating incident, Pearl Harbor is bombed. Now Sumiko and her family members are getting shipped off to an internment camp for the duration of the war. They eventually find themselves in one located on an Indian Reservation in Arizona. The Japanese-Americans don't want to be there and the Indians don't want them. Still,

while fighting boredom and the apparent death of her dreams, Sumiko is able to meet one of the Mohave boys that make deliveries to the camp and strike up a tentative friendship.

For Sumiko, it all starts with the birthday party of one of her classmates. When she arrives at a party to which the entire class has been invited, she is quietly and firmly ejected for being Japanese. "It's not me, dear," her classmate's mother says as she pushes Sumiko out the door, "but my husband has a few friends in back, some of the other parents who helped him raise some money for a charity we work with...." The possibility that the other parents might take offense to Sumiko being Japanese is enough for Sumiko to lose her invitation to the party. What she doesn't realize is that these attitudes shared by many of the *hakujin* (white people) are also enough for her to lose her home. When the United States is attacked by Japan at Pearl Harbor, the government rounds up all the *Niekki* --- people of Japanese ancestry, including American-born citizens --- sending them to internment camps in the center of the country. Leaving behind their flower farm, their home, and most of their belongings, Sumiko and her family are shipped to a relocation center in the Sonoran desert. There, amidst the grief and distress of an uprooted life, they do their best to rebuild their lives and form a community. For Sumiko this means planting a garden filled with the colorful and spicy-smelling weedflowers they farmed at home. Cynthia Kadohata won a Newbery Award for *KIRA-KIRA*, her portrait of a family of Japanese factory workers living in Georgia after WWII. One of the most difficult challenges for any writer is following up on such a resounding success. A book on Japanese internment camps is a subject that will resonate with librarians and teachers, but what is uncertain is whether or not it will also appeal to young readers.

"Weedflower" is the moving story of Japanese-Americans during WWII -- especially appropriate when the fragility of human rights is being demonstrated during yet another war. Sixth-grader Sumiko and her young brother Tak Tak were taken in by close relatives following the death of parents. Sumiko finds healing through hard work & dreams of someday owning a flower shop. Their life is one of few surprises, with strict adherence to the family regimen but Sumiko is crushed by rejection from the mother of a white schoolgirl who had invited her to a birthday party. Then follows the unthinkable blow of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the evacuation of "Nikkei" (Nisei) to detention centers. An important part of the book for me is what was NOT discussed; the curtain of dust in the desert is described in vivid detail so that readers will almost taste that suffocating bitterness. But Cynthia Kadohata does not mention the comfortable "others" shielded by a curtain of censorship employed by our government. It lowered this curtain separating those secure in their

rights from those who couldn't know whether their rights would ever again be respected. Curtained by dust and detention the Nisei agonized to make their lives orderly once more. Kadohata writes about the details of everyday life: in southern California where the flower farm was diligently tended & family standards adhered to /AND/ in the Camp built for detainees on a Mohave Indian reservation where the rigid family structure fell apart as goals were abandoned and purpose for living so deeply shaken. Recollecting the days after Pearl Harbor I am surprised by the perception that the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends) were the only group expressing shock and concern.

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