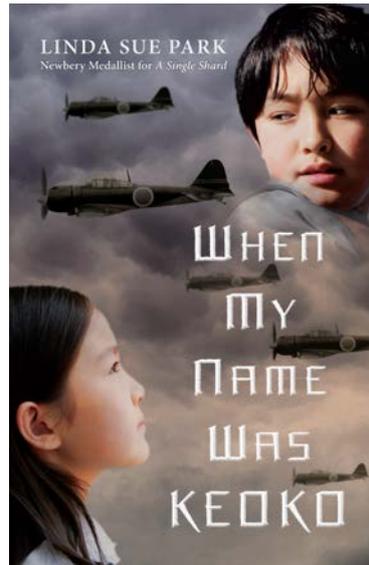


UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND PRESS

# WHEN MY NAME WAS KEOKO

## Linda Sue Park



### Teachers' Notes

Written by a practising teacher librarian  
in context with the Australian curriculum  
(English)

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**SYNOPSIS**

Sun-hee and her older brother Tae-yul are growing up in Japanese occupied Korea on the eve of Japan's entry into World War II. The Japanese have stripped Korea of its culture, language and traditions. Intimidated and afraid, the community is filled with those who meekly follow orders and those who resist oppression in their own ways – but at what cost?

In a story that explores the tremendous strains placed on families and relationships during tyranny and wartime, *When My Name Was Keoko* depicts the fear, insecurities and doubt that fill Sun-hee and all that she knows. Amidst such fear however lie enduring courage, hope and a sense of identity.

**THEMES**

Korean Culture and Identity:

- Korean culture and the loss of Korean identity from the Japanese occupation are explored in the text.

Family and Relationships:

- The relationships between the members of Sun-hee's family are tested and strengthened.
- Although changed by the Japanese occupation, Sun-hee's friendships survive the upheaval.

Courage:

- Sun-hee and Tae-yul show tremendous courage in very different ways.
- Other family members such as Sun-hee's father and uncle also show courage.

Japan's Involvement in World War II:

- Japan's involvement in World War II, beginning with the attack on Pearl Harbour through to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, provide the historical framework for the text.
- Kamikaze pilots feature in *When My Name Was Keoko*.

**WRITING STYLE**

*When My Name Was Keoko* is told as a dual narrative. Sun-hee and Tae-yul share their stories, showing the multi-layered issues that accompanied the Japanese occupation of Korea. The use of two narrators helps to fully explore the complexity and hardship the Korean's faced during this era of Japanese occupation. Sun-hee is naïve and obedient, taking refuge in her diary, while Tae-yul is older and shares in his uncle's more overt hatred of the Japanese. Both siblings resist the Japanese in their own ways, giving insight into this troubling period in Korean history.

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## STUDY NOTES

- *When My Name Was Keoko* is set during Japan's occupation of Korea. Teaching explicit internet search and note-taking techniques, research this era in more detail. Organise your notes using a graphic organiser. Add to these notes as you read the novel. Include a section in your notes for asking inquiry questions.
- Provide students with a range of carefully selected images depicting Japanese Korea from Google Images. Create photo journals or digital stories to reflect this time in history.
- Create a timeline of Japan's involvement in World War II, using examples from the text to help synthesise the novel with its historical setting.
- Linda Sue Park uses figurative language to help enrich her characters' thoughts and feelings. As you are reading, keep a journal of this type of language and discuss how it contributes to the text. Examples include:
  - 'Uncle's face is as red as a pepper.' p6
  - 'It feels all wrong, like shoes that don't fit.' p11
  - 'It seemed that an unknown creature came to life in the brush as soon as I picked it up – a creature light as a dragonfly, smooth as a snake, quick as a rabbit.' p21
  - 'I felt as if I were floating on a bright rosy cloud.' p23
  - 'My legs turned to paper.' p124
  - 'The unfairness of it all was choking me.' p126
  - 'The expression on her face was like a bitter wind.' p145
- Many Korean traditions were outlawed by the Japanese. Keep a record as these traditions and elements of Korean identity are mentioned in the novel. How did the characters counteract the strict Japanese laws in order to secretly preserve these traditions?
- The Koreans changing their names to Japanese names was one of the harshest laws. Uncle says, 'my name is my soul' (p6). What does he mean by this? How important is your name to you? Write a reflection to communicate your feelings about this part of the story.
- Sun-hee says, 'remembering isn't something you can stop doing just because you want to' (p11). Discuss this in small groups. What does Sun-hee mean? Share a time when you have had trouble trying to forget something.

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- The Korean Olympic marathon runner is still recorded as Japanese in many record books. Watch Sohn Kee Chung lighting the Olympic flame at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Imagine you are Sohn Kee Chung. Write a diary entry to share your feelings as you light the flame.  
<http://www.yos.flame.utube.com/watch?v=xgAXCAWQUic>
- Examine the Korean flag in light of the story told by Uncle.
- Sun-hee's and Tae-yul's narrative voices are very distinct. Brainstorm and discuss as a class the traits of both characters and how Linda Sue Park has differentiated between their personalities, thoughts and feelings. Choose a way in which to visually represent the characters of Sun-hee and Tae-yul. Ensure that your representation shows your deep and full understanding of their characters. Consider the different ways in which their personalities are conveyed by the author.
- Choose one of these characters and write an additional chapter suitable for inclusion in *When My Name Was Keoko*.
- Discuss the friendships that Sun-hee shares with characters such as Tomo and Jung-shin. How do these friendships contribute to the text? What do they show about Sun-hee and the difficulties for all during the Japanese occupation of Korea?
- Sun-hee enjoys learning the kanji characters. She uses stories to help remember the characters. Take time to learn some of these characters and the stories that go with them (refer to p23).
- Why is Sun-hee proud of Omoni for breaking the law and secretly planting the Sharon tree? How is the planting of this tree both in the pot and again at the end of the text symbolic?
- The Japanese spread anti-American propaganda in Korea. Discuss the use of propaganda during wartime.
- What does Mrs Ahn mean when she says, 'They cannot have my thoughts. I will not allow it.' (p63)?
- Why does Sun-hee stop talking after Uncle leaves?
- Discuss Sun-hee's question – can Korean thoughts be written in Japanese?

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- Sun-hee decides to keep a diary. Included in her diary are many poems that share her inner-most thoughts. Re-read her poems, looking at the poetic devices, especially the metaphors and imagery. Many of her poems are allegories. Discuss allegories and why Sun-hee uses them in her diary.
- Write your own allegorical poetry. Brainstorm as a class possible topics for such poems.
- Imagine you are Sun-hee. Write some of her diary entries, using events from the story to reflect upon in your entries.
- Tae-yul is fascinated by kamikaze pilots. Research the role that kamikazes played in World War II. In the role of Tae-yul, write a journal entry that discusses your interest in becoming a pilot.
- Discuss how Tae-yul would have been feeling when he discovered he was to become a kamikaze pilot. Imagine you are about to commence your mission. What would be going through your mind?
- What does Sun-hee mean when she says, 'When he (Tae-yul) left, he took too many of my thoughts with him.' (p135)?
- Tae-yul writes letters home to his family. Sun-hee comments that letters require a very formal style. Analyse the style used to write letters. Write a letter to your family, imagining you are away from home. This could be a letter from camp or from a day at school.
- Before his mission, Tae-yul is forced to think about things that he's never before contemplated such as fatherhood and marriage – things that he will never know if his mission is a success. Re-read this passage on p176/177. Discuss the way in which Linda Sue Park has been able to evoke a sense of hopelessness and fear through her language choices.
- Read Sun-hee's poem about uncertainty on p180. Discuss both the simplicity and complexity in this short verse.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Linda Sue Park** is the acclaimed author of more than a dozen books for young readers who received the Newbery Medal for her novel *A Single Shard*. She has worked as a food journalist, a public relations writer and a teacher of English as a second language. She now writes full time and travels widely, including visits to India, Russia and Korea, to meet readers and promote reading. She lives in Rochester, New York, with her husband. They have two grown children.

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