

# Title: *When My Name of Keoko* by Linda Sue Park (Published in 2002)

Approved for use in English II

## Summary of the Work:

Sun-hee and her older brother Tae-yul are proud of their Korean heritage. Yet they live their lives under Japanese occupation. All students must read and write in Japanese and no one can fly the Korean flag. Hardest of all is when the Japanese Emperor forces all Koreans to take Japanese names. Sun-hee and Tae-yul become Keoko and Nobuo. Korea is torn apart by their Japanese invaders during World War II. Everyone must help with war preparations, but it doesn't mean they are willing to defend Japan. Tae-yul is about to risk his life to help his family, while Sun-hee stays home guarding life-and-death secrets.

## Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

"Living in Korea in the 1940s was difficult because the Japanese, who occupied the country, seemed determined to obliterate Korean culture and to impose their own on its residents. Sun-hee and her older brother, Tae-yul, still go to school every day, but lessons now consist of lectures and recitations designed to glorify Japan. To add to their unhappiness, everyone, adults and children alike, must give up their Korean names and take new Japanese ones. Sun-hee, now called Keoko, and Tae-yul, newly named Nobuo, tell the story in alternating narrative voices. They describe the hardships their family is forced to face as Japan becomes enmeshed in World War II and detail their individual struggles to understand what is happening. Tension mounts as Uncle, working with the Korean resistance movement, goes into hiding, and Tae-yul takes a drastic step that he feels is necessary to protect the family. What is outstanding is the insight Park gives into the complex minds of these young people. Each of them reacts to the events in different ways—Sun-hee takes refuge in writing while Tae-yul throws his energies into physical work. Yet in both cases they develop subtle plans to resist the enemy. Like the Rose of Sharon tree, symbol of Korea, which the family pots and hides in their shed until their country is free, Sun-hee and Tae-yul endure and grow. This beautifully crafted and moving novel joins a small but growing body of literature, such as Haemi Balgassi's *Peacebound Trains* (Clarion, 1996) and Sook Nyul Choi's *The Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (Houghton, 1991), that expands readers' understanding of this period."  
—School Library Journal, starred review

"A brother and sister alternate as narrators in Newbery Medalist Park's well-constructed novel, which takes place from 1940-1945 in Japanese-occupied Korea. The Japanese government forbids the Korean language to be spoken and the country's flag to be flown, and even forces Korean families like Tae-yul and Sun-hee's to change their names (Sun-hee becomes Keoko). Through the use of the shifting narrators, Park subtly points up the differences between male and female roles in Korean society; and the father's process of choosing the family's Japanese name speaks volumes about his strength and intelligence. As the war intensifies, each family member asserts his or her individuality, from Sun-hee, who continues to keep a journal after a soldier calls it "a crime against

## Rationale:

Students will read the novel as an anchor text to serve as the basis for literary analysis and class and small group discussions.

## Noted Distinction:

2003 ALA Best Book for Young Adults  
2003 ALA Notable Book for Children  
2003 Bank Street Best Children's Books of the Year  
2002 Capitol Choices Noteworthy Book for Children and Teens  
2003 CCBC Choices  
Charlie May Simon Children's Book Award Nominee (AR)  
2003-2004 Dorothy Canfield Fisher Book Award Nominee (VT)  
2005 Garden State (NJ) Teen Book Award Nominee  
2003 IRA Teachers' Choices Reading List  
2003 Jane Addams Book Award Honor Book  
2004-2005 Lamplighter Award Nominee  
2004 Maine Student Book Award Master List  
2005 Mark Twain Award Master List (MO)  
2002 Michigan Library Association's Mitten Award Winner  
2002 New York Public Library, 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing  
2003 Notable Books for a Global Society  
2003 Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies  
2003 NYPL Books for the Teen Age List  
2002 Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year  
2005 Rebecca Caudill Young Readers Book Award Master List (IL)  
2002 School Library Journal, Best Books of the Year  
2005 Sequoyah Book Award (OK) Nominee  
2004 Skipping Stones Honor Award  
2006 Sunshine State Young Readers' Master List (FL)

## Readability

- Lexile Score: 610
- Readability Level: 5.1

## Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

**Standard Alignment:** CCSS 9-10.1. 9-10.2, 9-10.3, 9-10.5, 9-10.6, 9-10.9

## Approval:

**Submitted to Committee:**

**Approved for Adoption:**

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our Divine Emperor," to her uncle, who prints a revolutionary newspaper in hiding, to Tae-yul, who joins the Japanese army to avoid helping the military police capture his uncle only to be chosen as a kamikaze pilot. ... telling details provide a clear picture of Sun-hee and Tae-yul and their world. Readers will come away with an appreciation of this period of history and likely a greater interest in learning more about it."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

\* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

\* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

## **Notes on the Text:**

Sun-hee and her older brother, Tae-yul, live in Korea with their parents. Because Korea is under Japanese occupation, the children study Japanese and speak it at school. Their own language, their flag, the folktales Uncle tells them—even their names—are all part of the Korean culture that is now forbidden.

When World War II comes to Korea, Sun-hee is surprised that the Japanese expect their Korean subjects to fight on their side. But the greatest shock of all comes when Tae-yul enlists in the Japanese army in an attempt to protect Uncle, who is suspected of aiding the Korean resistance.

Sun-hee stays behind, entrusted with the life-and-death secrets of a family at war.

## **Connection to the Curriculum:**

The novel demonstrates literary techniques such as foreshadow, metaphor, symbolism, and voice. Students will utilize the novel for literary analysis and to inform their responses regarding cultural experiences and their impact on identity.

## **Additional Connections:**

*Students will make connections from the novel to previously read fiction and informational texts, poetry, and visual media.*