

Novel Resource #3- Project Mulberry

Project Mulberry
Linda Sue Park
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About the Author

“READ! If you want to be a writer, you have to read A LOT. Reading is training for writers the same way that working out is training for athletes!”

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photo by Klaus Pollmeier

Linda Sue Park was born in Urbana, Illinois on March 25, 1960, and grew up outside Chicago. The daughter of Korean immigrants, she has been writing poems and stories since she was four years old, and her favorite thing to do as a child was read.

In 1990, Linda Sue continued teaching English to foreign students (which she still does today). It took her quite a while, but she finally realized that what she really wanted to do was to write books for children. In 1997, she started writing her first book, *Seesaw Girl*. It was accepted that same year and published in 1999.

The Kite Fighters came out in 2000. This book was especially exciting because the chapter-heading illustrations were done by Linda Sue's dad. *A Single Shard* was published in March 2001 and was awarded the 2002 Newberry Medal. In March 2002, her fourth novel, *When My Name Was Keoko* came out. Five picture books are forthcoming. Linda Sue has also published poems and short fiction for adults in several journals and on-line publications.

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More Books By Linda Sue Park

Archers Quest

A Single Shard

The Kite Fighters

Bee-bim Bop

What Does Bunny See?

Mung Mung

Project Mulberry

When My Name was Keoko

Seesaw Girl

Yum Yuk

The Firekeeper's Son

Project Mulberry

Realistic Fiction

Lexile- 690 L

Interest Level- Grades 4-7

Reading Level- 4.3

Linda Sue Park talks to the main character, Julia, between chapters in the book. She gives the reader personal information about herself and her life. Her father actually raised silkworms and kept a diary about the experience that she used to base the book upon. On her website she has the diary and pictures from his experience.

Where do you get your ideas?

From the idea store, of course!

Just kidding. I get ideas from reading books and articles, listening to people talk, watching TV and movies; from things I see and hear; from sitting around daydreaming. Ideas are everywhere: The important thing is to find the ones that interest you.

Julia Song and her friend Patrick would love to win a blue ribbon, maybe even two, at the state fair.

They've always done projects together, and they work well as a team. This time, though, they're having trouble coming up with just the right plan. Then Julia's mother offers a suggestion: They can raise silkworms, as she did when she was a girl in Korea. Patrick thinks it's a great idea. Of course there are obstacles - for example, where will they get mulberry leaves, the only thing silkworms eat?—but nothing they can't handle.

Julia isn't so sure. The club where kids do their projects is all about traditional American stuff, and raising silkworms just doesn't fit in. Moreover, the author, Ms.

Park, seems determined to make Julia's life as complicated as possible, no matter how hard Julia tries to talk her out of it.

Annotation

Julia Song begins the story telling the reader about her dislike of kimchee, a spicy, Korean cabbage that her family eats every single night at dinner. Julia is Korean-American, and when she is deciding on a project for the WIGGLE club with her best friend Patrick, she wants to get away from anything Korean. However, her mom suggests a silkworm project that seems amazing, and immediately Patrick takes to the idea. Julia is not nearly as thrilled.

The only problem is, the pair need to find a Mulberry tree so they can feed the silkworms. The silkworms have to have fresh leaves, and the search seems endless. Julia and Patrick put up flyers, ask neighbors, but cannot seem to find a tree. Julia is ecstatic, but Patrick is disappointed. To Patrick's surprise, a man calls and says that he has a tree they can use! Mr. Dixon is an older African American man who is kind and interested in Patrick and Julia's project.

Soon, Julia decides that trying to spoil their project will not work, and she becomes excited about the silkworms hatching. She wants to use the silk to embroider a picture to enter into the state fair as well. When the eggs hatch, Julia becomes almost more excited than Patrick. However, soon Julia finds out that to get the silk from the silkworms, the worms have to be killed instead of turning into moths. She has to make a tough decision, and finds out that she only needs five silkworms to make thread. The other silkworms will be able to turn into moths! She and Patrick get to enter the state fair, and although they do not take home a blue ribbon, they still are winners.

In the story, Julia talks to Linda Sue Park between each chapter about what is going on and how she gets her ideas. In these short bits the reader finds out more about Ms. Park and why she has written this story. This is a great story about embracing heritage and working hard towards a goal. I loved the friendship Patrick and Julia have, and their hard work pays off in the end.

Booktalk

"Jules, we can raise the—the caterpillars, and get the thread from them, and then you can sew something with the thread, and we can enter the project in two categories—Animal Husbandry and Domestic Arts!"

Julia Song is in the WIGGLE Club- Work- Grow- Give- Live, and with her best friend Patrick, has to create a project involving animals and raising them. Unfortunately, both families live in townhouses, so that limits the animals they could possibly use. When Julia's mother comes up with the idea to raise silkworms, Patrick is all for it. Julia is not. For the first half of the story, Julia tries

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anything and everything she can think of to damage their project. She wants something more “American.” When Patrick and Julia find someone who owns a Mulberry tree, Julia thinks there is no way out. What becomes of Patrick’s and Julia’s silkworm project? Does Julia get her way? Or does she figure out that her Korean background could actually help her win a blue ribbon in the state fair?

Characters

Julia

- Main character- 7th grade girl
- Korean-American
- Crafty, creative, artsy

Patrick

- Julia’s best friend- 7th grade boy
- Smart, intelligent, loves to read and learn

Mr. Dixon

- Older, African- American man
- Owner of the town’s only Mulberry tree
- Loves cooking and gardening, kind

Mr. Maxwell

- School sponsor of WIGGLE club
- Farmer, horticulturalist
- Knowledgeable about plants and animals

Mrs. Song

- Julia’s mother
- Embraces Korean culture

Setting

The setting of this story is present day, and takes place at Julia’s house and Mr. Dixon’s backyard. Most of the story takes place on Julia’s back porch with the silkworms.

Point of View

The story is told from a first person limited omniscient point of view of Julia, the main character.

Conflict and Resolution

Throughout the story, Julia is having an internal conflict with herself about creating a Korean project for the state fair. Julia is a girl who wants to be more American, and is not exactly embarrassed by her Korean background, but would like to be more “American.” She keeps a secret from her best friend and partner about her desire to do a different project, and is battling herself on whether or not she should say anything or give in to the project.

Theme

The theme of this story is to embrace yourself and background. Julia spends much of the story trying to become more “American” but in the end realizes that it is important to keep her Korean culture. Julia is a middle school girl who is trying to figure out who she is, and with the help of her best friend Patrick, she discovers the importance of embracing herself, without caring what others think or believe.

Read Aloud Passages

p. 23- “I went to get my backpack, wondering when Patrick would notice that I was not one bit excited about doing a silkworm project.”

This quote describes Julia’s attitude towards the silkworm project through the first half of the story. She wants something American, not Korean, and because Patrick was so excited, she didn’t tell him that she would rather do something else.

p.122- “I blinked, then stared for a few seconds. The hairs were so tiny that I almost couldn’t tell—were they moving? Yes—yes, there they went again, tiny, tiny wiggles... wiggles. They weren’t hairs. They were worms. Little tiny itchy-bitsy worms! Our eggs had hatched!

This is where Julia gets excited about raising the silkworms. She finally is coming around and starting to care about the project.

Other Suggested Readings

If you like *Project Mulberry*, you will love *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park, a Newberry Award winner!

If you like *Project Mulberry*, you will love *A House of Tailors* by Patricia Reilly Giff.

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