

Weedflower
Historical Fiction by Cynthia Kadohata
Atheneum Books for Young Readers
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About the Author

Cynthia Kadohata's childhood was full of transitions, which is reflected in her novels. Born in Chicago on July 2, 1956, her family moved many times in her youth. Her grandparents were immigrants from Japan.

Although she loved to read she dropped out of high school to work, and then studied Journalism at the University of Southern California. Her original motivation came from short stories, and she set a goal of writing one a month. After finding success in story writing, she began her novel writing career, first for adults. Cynthia Kadohata won the Newbery Medal in 2005 for *Kira-Kira*, about a Japanese American girl growing up in rural Georgia.

Her father was interned at Poston in Arizona during World War II. This is the setting for *Weedflower*. For this historical fiction, motivated by the experience of tens of thousands of Japanese interned in the United States, Cynthia Kadohata creates a moving story of a family who progresses from a hardworking life in California, to an internment camp.

Through her writings for adults and children, she is considered a spokesperson for the Asian American community. She lives in California with her son, and Doberman and gains energy to write by traveling across America.

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Biography Resource Center

"Cynthia Kadohata." Authors and Artists for Young Adults. Vol. 71. Thomson Gale, 2006. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2008.

www.inspire.net

Cynthia Kadohata's other children's and young adult books:

Kira-Kira, 2005 Newbery Award Winner

Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam

Annotation:

Weedflower, by Cynthia Kadohata, is historical fiction about a Japanese family interned during World War II. Many young adult readers might be tempted to put the book back on the shelf. But after just a few pages, the reader will be drawn in through descriptive language and anecdotal character development that will encourage the reader to continue.

Sumiko, the main character, is a typical eleven year old girl. She daydreams in school and wants to have friends. She and her brother, Tak-Tak, live with an Aunt and Uncle because their parents were killed in a car crash. The two older cousins, Bull and Ichiro, are the big brothers of the family. Japanese culture, and respect for family and the elderly are prevalent throughout the book. Sumiko's grandfather has a strong presence in the family.

In California, the family operates a flower farm. They grow carnations from seed, sort the flowers (which is Sumiko's job), and sell them. The family works hard, but has a comfortable, stable life, until Pearl Harbor.

Pearl Harbor causes their life to be full of fear. Rumors spread, and then become true, that the Japanese Americans will be forced to leave their homes. Kadohata describes in detail the painful decisions for each person. Tak-Tak's uncle sells his prized possession, the family horse. Mrs. Ono leaves behind her dog, with a dish of food.

Their happy, simple lives are turned upside-down in one day as they are relocated. The families in this novel are moved to Poston in Arizona. It is extremely desert land, hot and dry, compared with their life in California. Later they find out that Poston is an Indian Reservation and the Indians are not happy the Japanese Americans are there.

Daily life at Poston is described in many short chapters, primarily through Sumiko's experiences. The living barracks, mess hall, sewing clubs, school (with one book for the entire class to share), rattlesnakes, and scorpions. At the beginning there is not even a fence, because if anyone tried to get away they would die from lack of water. As the war continues the cousins are drafted, and some are allowed to leave the camp, including Sumiko and her Aunt.

As a child, Kadohata's father lived at Poston, so this book is based on her family life. Through stories of their daily life, Kadohata clearly describes the painful reality of prejudice and deprivation of civil rights during this time in American history. The people and events described in this book are not easily forgotten.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Point of View: third person

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Theme(s): Asian Americans, Native Americans, Human Rights, Prejudice & Racism

The title Weedflower is the main character's nickname given by a Mohave friend. Also in California, the flower crops grown in fields, such as the Matsuda's carnation farm, were called "weedflowers" by local growers.

Conflict: Shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, all Japanese Americans were faced with some level of arrest or internment. This book contains external conflict as Sumiko's Grandfather and Uncle, first generation immigrants, were taken to a high security camp, and the rest of family was interned at Poston Camp in Arizona. Additionally, the author in describing daily life explains the internal conflict of each character in dealing with this unfair internment. There is a second story line with external conflict because Poston is located on a Indian Reservation, so the Japanese are unwelcome residents.

Conflict Resolution: This novel's story explains the inequities and prejudice toward the Japanese Americans. As Americans perceived the threat lessened, Sumiko's family had more freedoms at the camp, and Sumiko develops a relationship with a Mohave boy. After losing their prior life as flower growers, the conflict is resolved with the older boys enlisting in the Army, and the rest of the family starting a new life in Chicago.

Characters:

Name of Character	Relationship(s)	Personal and Physical Traits
Sumiko Yamaguchi	Main character	Orphan, adopted by Aunt & Uncle when parents died in car accident
Tak-Tak Yamaguchi	Brother	Thick glasses; he is the “little brother that needs to be watched”
Hatsumi Matsuda	Uncle	Strong and proud
Auntie	Aunt	Did not have a sense of humor; loved her family; worried for their future
Jichan Masanori Matsuda	Grandpa	Issei- first generation Japanese in U.S.
Bull Matsuda	Cousin of Sumiko	Age 19- level headed- very thoughtful and caring for his orphaned cousins
Ichiro Matsuda	Cousin of Sumiko	Age 23- lots of girlfriends, fancy clothes; excitable
Mr. Moto	Neighbor at Poston	Wise old man; is a teacher and humble student of Sumiko’s flower growing wisdom
Frank	Friend at Poston	Mohave Indian boy- is curious about the Japanese; wants to know how to grow plants in the desert

Setting: 1941 California, Poston Internment Camp in the deserts of Arizona

Interest Level: Grades 6-8

Reading Level: 5.3 (lexile 750)

Booktalk:

Have you ever been unfairly treated? Most of us have. And because the family in this novel was unfairly treated you might think I would recommend this book to you. But I have one more question. Have you really, really, REALLY been unfairly treated? Let's say SO unfairly that the United States government did things to your family that they are now ashamed about.

Some of you may know that the Japanese made a surprise air attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II. Japan was an ally with the Germans. At that point, anyone of Japanese heritage was considered suspicious to the American Government. Americans were afraid. Afraid that the Japanese would make another surprise attack, a plan was put in place by the FBI. All of Japanese heritage would be collected together and put in "internment" camps. This was not like prison, it was a place where they could be isolated. Thousands and thousands of Japanese Americans were taken from their homes.

Let's talk about Weedflower. Sumiko's family is Japanese American and their family business is to raise flowers, carnations. Because they don't have a fancy set-up to raise their flowers the other growers call them "Weedflowers". The girl on the cover is given the nick-name Weedflower by a friend.

Sumiko's family was interned. Can you imagine? One day the FBI came and took them away on a train. They could take only what they could carry. They left homes, businesses, pets and beloved possessions behind. They had done nothing wrong except to be Japanese.

You will enjoy the characters in the story. Sumiko and her brother lived with an Aunt and Uncle, and their older cousins are like big brothers to them. Although they are in a difficult situation, the family does the best they can. Cynthia Kahodata's descriptions are so real, you will feel like you are right at the camp.

Sumiko and a neighbor use their gardening skills and enter the camp's garden contest. The children have a school. The Poston Camp is located on an Indian Reservation and Sumiko makes friends with a Mohave boy. The Indians are not pleased that the Japanese are there.

You will probably have lots of questions after reading this book. Why didn't the people protest? What happened when these people were set free? Could our government do this again?

Discussion Questions for *Weedflower*, by Cynthia Kadohata

Pre-reading

1. Do you know which countries were involved in World War II?
2. Do you think you could be friends with someone who was an immigrant?
3. Do you think you could be friends with someone who was an immigrant if their country was at war with the United States? Why or why not?

Chapter 1

4. What were “weedflowers”? (p. 5)
5. Describe the rules for Japanese immigrants. (p. 6)
6. How were the flowers graded? (p. 9)
7. Why did Sumiko work so hard? (p. 9-10)

Chapter 2

8. How did Sumiko get her scar? (p. 12)
9. Who were the Nikkei? (p. 14)
10. Why did Uncle come to America? (p. 18)

Chapter 3

11. Describe the game of P-I-G. (p. 25-26)

Chapter 4

12. Have you ever been “uninvited” to a party? (p. 36) How do you think you would feel if you were in Sumiko’s situation?

Chapter 5

13. Why were the Japanese burning their things? (p. 49)

Chapter 6

14. Why do you think they took the Issei (first generation Japanese) first? (p. 56)

Chapter 7

15. To freeze an account at a bank means that people were not allowed to withdraw their own money. (p. 61) Why do you think this was done to the Japanese Americans?

Chapter 8

16. Why did the family not escape to one of the places they discussed? (p. 70-71)

Chapter 9

17. Why was the family selling all of their possessions? (p. 72-76)

Chapter 10

18. When she left her home, who was Mrs. Ono most worried about? (p. 82)

Chapter 11

19. What did Sumiko do when she was scared or sad? (p. 86)

Chapter 12

20. What details were missing from the “diorama” of the barracks? (p. 90-91)

21. How did the letter from the new owner of Mrs. Ono’s house make you feel? (p. 93)

Chapter 13

22. What event stopped the train? (p. 98)

23. What event stopped the bus? (p. 102)

Chapter 14

24. What did Sumiko eat for dinner rather than what was not served at the mess hall? (p. 112-113)

Chapter 15

25. Describe the Indian boys’ attitudes toward the Japanese in the camp. (p. 122-123)

Chapter 16

26. Why did they beat Yamada, the inu (p. 131-132)?

Chapter 17

27. What was the difference between Poston and the other relocation camps? (p. 131-133)

28. What did Sumiko tell the Indian boy about? (p. s 141-142)

Chapter 18

29. Describe how Sumiko and Mr. Moto were going to plant their garden. (p. 145-147)

Chapter 19

30. When Sumiko asked her brothers they told her what her garden was missing. What was it and how did she find it? (p. 150)

Chapter 20

31. What nickname did the Mohave boy give Sumiko? (p. 161)

Chapter 21

32. What did Sumiko and the Mohave boy have in common? (p. 165)

33. What did the Mohave boy want from Sumiko? (p. 166-167)

Chapter 22

34. Describe the athletic event that happened at the camp (p. 170-171)

Chapter 23

35. What did Ichiro and his friends like to argue about? (p. 178)

Chapter 24

36. Describe the chicken stealing event in this chapter. (p. 190-193)

Chapter 25

37. Why did Sumiko think that Frank was officially her friend? (p. 202)

Chapter 26

38. Why do you think that the interned Japanese had no war news? (p. 204-205)

Chapter 27

39. Why had there been fires in some of the barracks? (p. 209)

Chapter 28

40. What right did Arizona Native Americans NOT have? (p. 214) Does that surprise you? Why or why not?

Chapter 29

41. What were the two questions that the Japanese adults would be asked? (p. 224)

Chapter 30

42. What was Auntie's plan for the family? (p. 233)

Chapter 31

43. What happened when Sumiko went to visit her uncle? (p. 238)

Chapter 32

44. What do you think about Sumiko's list at the end of the chapter? (p. 247)

45.

Chapter 33

46. Sumiko realized that Jichan came to America, not for freedom, but for _____ . How did that help Sumiko with her decision?

End Note

47. What happened to Poston?

Post-reading

48. Do you think that Sumiko would ever grow flowers again? Why or why not?

49. Would you fight for your country, if your family was being treated like the Japanese or Indians were?

Language/Vocabulary for Weedflower, by Cynthia Kadohata

Most definitions taken from www.wordcentral.com Student Dictionary

Fluke (p. 3)- something that happens by accident

Outhouse (p. 6)- an outdoor restroom; a little shed with a hole to go to the bathroom

Irate (p. 24)- extremely angry

Taunted (p. 24)- to tease in an insulting way

Ripe (p. 27)- smelly bathwater from being used so many times

Disloyal (p. 51)- anything that showed they were Japanese, because the U.S. was at war with the Japanese

Sabotage (p. 66)- actions against Americans; after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans expected other surprises from the Japanese

Barracks (p. 84)- a large building where many soldiers live, or in this case Japanese families live together

Scorpion (p. 108)- an insect with a poisonous stinger on its tail

Prejudice (p. 179)- to have a bad opinion about someone without knowing them

Japanese words and phrases

Chanpon (p. 7)- a mix of Japanese and English

Nikkei- (p. 14)- Anyone in America of Japanese descent

Gaman (p. 43)- we must bear it

Isoginasai (p. 49) hurry

Hakujin (p. 52) white people

Haji (p. 98, 100) guilt

Shikata ga na (p. 129) that cannot be helped

Inu (p. 131, also known as dog, snitch)- a Nikkei who spied on other Japanese and reported to the white administration

Namakemono (p. 137) lazy or lazybones

Nisei (p. 177)- 2nd generation Japanese

Indiana Academic Standards met by novel content

Social Studies 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 8.1.27, 8.1.31, 8.2.1, 8.2.3

Language Arts 6.2.3, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 7.1.3, 7.2.4, 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.5, 8.1.3, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.3.5, 8.3.7

Anticipation Statements

Before		Weedflower By Cynthia Kadohata	AFTER	
Agree	Disagree		Agree	Disagree
		If you knew your family would be forced to leave your home, the best thing to do would be to try to sell everything in your house.		
		It is impossible to “uninvite” someone from a birthday party after you’ve given them an invitation.		
		When America is at war with country “X” then American citizens from country “X” should be treated differently.		
		It would be hard for a California farmer to adapt to growing conditions in the desert.		
		If it was something you believed in, it would be easy to protest		
		When adults face a difficult problem they usually can figure out a solution.		

Read-Aloud Passages

Read Aloud from Chapter 1

“Party Invitation”, p. 1-2

Importance of this passage: In these first two pages of the book the author explains what it feels like to be lonely, then shares her excitement over a birthday party invitation.

Read Aloud from Chapter 11

”Trip to the Evacuation Shelter”, p. 84-86 (through “we don’t have a choice)

Importance of this passage: This describes their arrival at the first evacuation center where they will be temporarily living in horses’ stables. “How are we going to live here?” “What do you mean, how? We don’t have a choice.”

Read-Alikes

If you like Weedflower, by Cynthia Kadohata, then you may like:

Fiction books about Japanese Americans during World War II

Baseball Saved Us, Ken Mochizuki

A Boy at War: A Novel of Pearl Harbor, A Boy No More, Heroes Don't Run, by Henry Mazer

The Journal of Ben Uchida Citizen #13559, Mirror Lake Internment Camp, by Barry Denenberg

Journey Home, Yoshiko Uchida

Under the blood-red sun, by Graham Salisbury.

Non-Fiction

The children of Topaz: the story of a Japanese American internment camp: based on a classroom diary, by Michael Tunnell

The invisible thread: an autobiography, by Yoshiko Uchida

Other Fiction about Japanese Americans

Kim/Kimi, by Hadley Irwin

Kira-Kira, by Cynthia Kadohata

Also, check out other books by Cynthia Kadohata

Kira-Kira, 2005 Newbery Award Book

Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam

**Across the Curriculum Connections
Subject and Activities**

Science Activity- Planting Gardens

Design a “science fair” type experiment based on Sumiko’s gardening techniques.

Materials: Planting soil, pots, flower seeds, supplies for compost
Paper for note taking

Working in pairs:

1. Design an experiment planting flowers using the variables of water and “organic” materials for fertilizer.
2. Use the scientific method, following all steps in your design.

Check this website, if a sample experiment design is needed:

<http://www.chestersciencefair.org/resources/general/samplegrading.doc>

IN Academic Standards Science 6.2.5, 6.3.8, 6.4.8, 7.4.8, 8.1.3, 8.2.8

History Activity- Using Primary Sources

Using primary sources (letters), students will gain a more personal understanding of the people and circumstances surrounding the internment of Japanese Americans. Through readings at the Smithsonian website, students make deductions about life in an internment camp by reading and comparing letters written to Clara Breed. Along the way, they consider the advantages of looking at a historical event from the multiple points of view of eyewitnesses.

Materials: Computers for online access (or teacher may print out web pages which would include 3 letters, 3 question sheets and a graphic organizer)
Paper for note taking

Working in pairs, students will:

1. Access the Smithsonian website and follow instructions

http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/educators/lesson_plans/japanese_internment/lesson1_main.html

2. Complete a Letter Question sheet for each letter (3). Questions include:

- a. Who wrote this?
- b. When was it written?
- c. Where was it written?
- d. To whom was it written?
- e. What it is about?
- f. Why was it written?

3. Compile information in the Graphic Organizer which will compare three letters, answering the questions:

- a. What did people in camp do to fill their time?
- b. What kind of things did they miss?
- c. What did they complain about?
- d. What did they do to improve their lives?

4. Be ready to share their results with the class

IN Academic Standards Social Studies

6.1.16, 6.1.20, 6.1.22, 7.1.15, 7.1.18, 8.1.28, 8.2.2, 8.2.4

Supplemental Resources

Books

The following books provide background information on Japanese Internment:

Tunnell, Michael. *The children of Topaz: the story of a Japanese American internment camp: based on a classroom diary.* New York : Holiday House, c1996.

Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki. *Farewell to Manzanar: a true story of Japanese American Experience during and after World War II.* New York : Bantam, 1974, c1973.

McGowen, Tom. "Go for broke": Japanese Americans in World War II. New York : Franklin Watts, 1995.

Uchida, Yoshiko. *The invisible thread: an autobiography.* New York : Beech Tree Books, 1995.

Yancy, Diane. *Life in a Japanese American Internment Camp.* San Diego, Calif. : Lucent Books, c1998.

Sinnott, Susan. *Our burden of shame: Japanese American internment during World War II.* New York : Franklin Watts, 1995.

Black, Wallace and Jean F. Blashfield. *Pearl Harbor.* New York : Canada, Toronto : c1991.

Haley, Alex. *When Justice Failed: The Fred Korematsu Story.* Austin, Tex. : Raintree/Steck 1993.

Website

Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives- excellent resource with primary documents, photographs and lesson plans

<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/>

CD *Book read on CD for read-alouds or reluctant readers*

Weedflower, New York: Random House/Listening Library, 2007.

An Online bookseller specializing in Japanese American books:

<http://heritagesource.com/>

Movies

Children of the Camps the documentary, San Francisco, CA: NAATA Distribution, 1999. Six individuals, interned as children, share their experiences, culture, family issues, grief and shame during World War II incarceration.

Going for Broke, Chicago: Questar, c2005.- A documentary about Japanese American soldiers who fought in WWII, while their families were in internment camps.

Rabbit in the moon, San Francisco, CA, Wabi-Sabi Productions, 1999.- A documentary/memoir about the lingering effects of the World War II internment of the Japanese American community.

Book Activities

Book Related Activity #1

Weedflower, Cynthia Kadohata

A Chapter “Play”

The purpose of this activity is to practice using speaking techniques, and to better understand the characters in the book. Students will work in groups, select a chapter with dialogue to read out loud, assigning each student a “part” to read. The groups will perform their chapters in play type format in front of the class.

- The students will work in groups of at least three
- Materials needed: Each student needs a copy of Weedflower
- Groups will:
 - Select a chapter to read and informally perform in front of the class (the chapter should have dialogue with at least two characters; a narrator should be assigned)
 - Practice reading parts
 - Prepare a brief introduction explaining why they picked the chapter and its significance to the rest of the novel
 - Props are optional
- Grading: This is a 50 point assignment (each student will receive their own grade)
 - 15 points for Introduction
 - 25 points for individual reading (expression, changes in voice, volume, enunciation and eye contact)
 - 10 points for overall presentation of the group

IN Academic Standards Language Arts 6.1.1, 6.7.7, 7.7.5 8.7.2

Book Related Activity #2
Weedflower, Cynthia Kadohata
Writing Prompts

The purpose of this activity is to use writing prompt to write a five paragraph essay in one class period. This could be used for a final exam for the book, or as practice for a standardized test.

- This is an individual project
- Materials needed: Each student needs a copy of Weedflower & notebook paper
- Student will
 - Select a one of the following writing prompts (this should be presented the day before writing, so students can decide on a prompt)
 - Follow procedures for writing a five paragraph essay
 - Prewriting/organization
 -
- Grading: This is a 50 point assignment
 - 10 points for thesis statement
 - 30 points- 10 points for body paragraph topic sentences, content and support ideas
 - 10 points for sentence structure, transitions, grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization

IN Academic Standards Language Arts

6.2.4, 6.2.7, 6.2.8, 6.3.2, 6.3.6, 6.4.3, 6.5.4, 6.6.1, 6.6.4, 6.6.5

7.2.7, 7.3.3, 7.3.4, 7.4.2, 7.4.3, 7.5.2, 7.5.5, 7.6.8

8.4.2, 8.4.3, 8.4.10, 8.5.2, 8.6.1, 8.6.5, 8.6.6, 8.6.7

Student will select ONE prompt and write a five paragraph essay.

**WEEDFLOWER WRITING PROMPT #1
LONELINESS**

On p. one of the book Weedflower, the main character's life is described.

“THIS IS WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BE LONELY:

1. Like everyone was looking at you. Sumiko felt this once in a while.
2. Like nobody was looking at you. Sumiko felt this a lot.
3. Like you didn't care about anything at all. She felt this maybe once a week.
4. Like you were *just* about to cry over every little thing. She felt this about once daily.

But not today!”

Write a five paragraph essay on loneliness. At least two of your main body paragraphs must include Sumiko's perspective and examples from her life.

**WEEDFLOWER WRITING PROMPT #2
ESSAY on JAPANESE INTERNMENT**

The book Weedflower follows a Japanese American family from their family routine, full of hard work and pride, selling all their possessions, and leaving the home they loved for an internment camp. After Pearl Harbor, the United States government believed this was the way to solve the problem of further Japanese attacks or spying. The government provided food, shelter, school, activities, and work for all the families they interned.

Write a five paragraph essay on what it was like to live in a Japanese internment camp.

**WEEDFLOWER WRITING PROMPT #3
FRIENDSHIP**

In Weedflower, Sumiko has several friends. On p. 163-164, Sumiko has these thoughts. “She wondered if [Frank] qualified as a “friend”. Sachi was a friend, and if Frank was a friend as well, that meant she had two friends. Three, counting Mr. Moto. Friendship was really different from the way she had envisioned it all these years. It seemed a lot more complicated. She'd thought friends just hung around together and held the same opinions on everything.”

Write a five paragraph essay on friendship. At least two of your main body paragraphs must include Sumiko's perspective and examples from her life.

Bibliography

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Beech Grove Middle School OPAC

<http://beechgrovemscatalog.surpasssoftware.com/beechgrovems/>

Kiester, Jane Bell. Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test: four steps to better scores for teachers of all levels. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House, 2000.

Indiana Academic Standards, <http://www.doe.state.in.us/standards/welcome2.html>

Indianapolis Marion County Public Library, www.imcpl.org/

Ingram Book Company, <https://ip.ingrambook.com/ip./hm001.jsp>

Scholastic Reading Counts Online Catalog, <http://src.scholastic.com/ecatalog/>

Student Dictionary, www.wordcentral.com

Teenreads Book Reviews www.teenreads.com