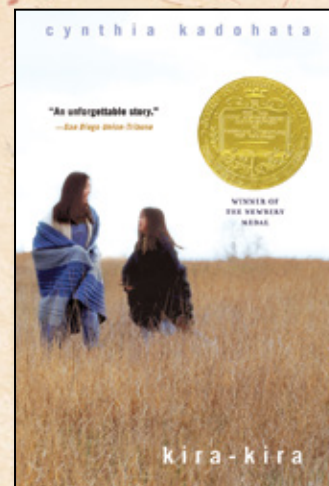
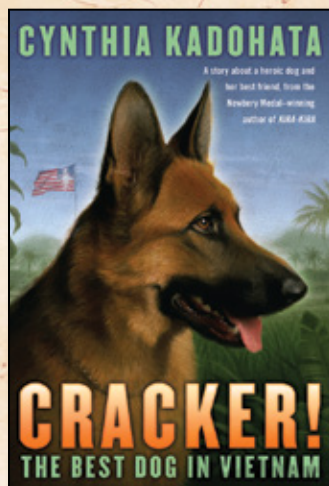
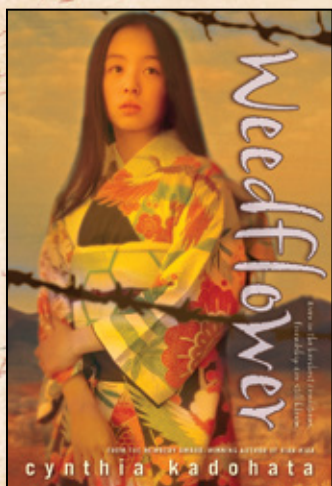
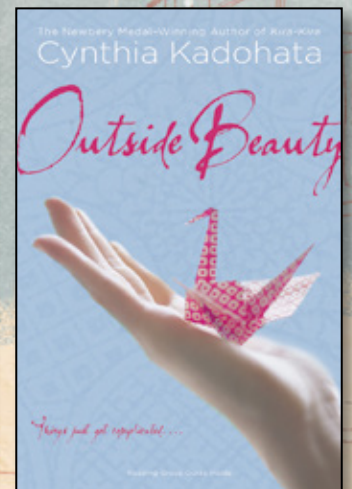
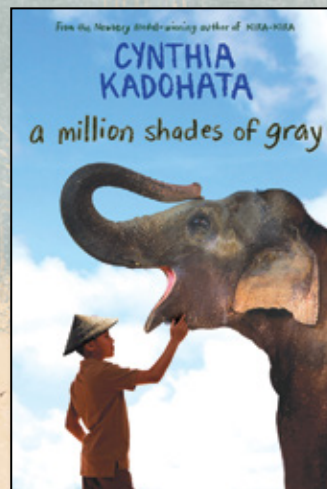
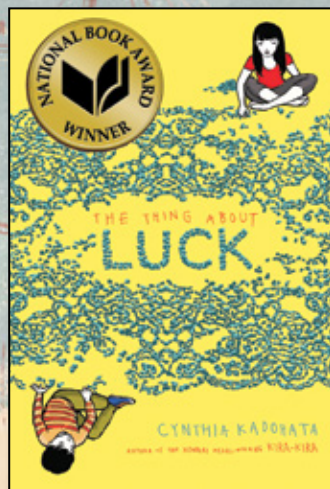


A Curriculum Guide to Books by **CYNTHIA KADOHATA**





HC: 9781442412750
Ebook: 9781442412774

Half a World Away

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Jaden has vague memories of his mother and questions why she gave him up when he was four. Having lived in a Romanian group home before being adopted by Penni and Steve at the age of eight, he refuses to accept or give love. When he learns that his parents plan to adopt a baby from Kazakhstan and that the family will travel there to bring the baby home, he questions whether he is good enough and if his parents are disappointed with him. Is it possible that his adopted parents will give him away, too?

In Kazakhstan, the family learns that the baby they had hoped for has already been adopted, and they must choose another. Jaden's mother is distraught; however, Jaden connects with an older child, Dimash, and begs his parents to adopt him instead of the new infant the agency offers. Dimash, however, is labeled as a "special needs" child, and Penni and Steve have plans to adopt a healthy infant boy. Jaden finds himself feeling worried about Dimash and what will become of him. Already four years old and barely able to speak, Dimash will soon age out of the orphanage, and then his life will be as hopeless as Jaden feels now.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

This activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (SL.6–8.1)

1. Have students work in pairs to find three interesting facts on the Internet about Kazakhstan and share their facts with the class.
2. Identify a picture book about adoption and read it to the class. Have students discuss the themes in the story (e.g., *The Starlight Baby* by Gillian Shields or *Mama for Owen* by Marion Dane Bauer).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 3, 4) (RL.6–7.2)

1. Jaden was adopted from a group home when he was eight. Using evidence from the text, discuss what the author reveals about Jaden's childhood prior to his being adopted.
2. Jaden speaks about his inability to understand love. What accounts for his confusion? Do his parents understand his feelings? Explain.
3. Describe Jaden's behavior and the efforts his parents take to help him adjust to his new life. Is Jaden grateful that Penni and Steve have adopted him? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. Discuss Jaden's feelings about having a younger brother. Are his feelings justified?
5. Why do Jaden's parents want an infant as opposed to a toddler? How does this desire impact Jaden?
6. Describe Jaden's relationship with Steve. How does his relationship with Steve differ from his relationship with Penni?
7. Once the family arrives in Kazakhstan, Penni and Steve leave Jaden alone in the apartment to go shopping. Jaden takes off after them but gets lost. Describe Jaden's emotions around this event. What does it reveal about his character? What does it reveal about his parents?
8. How does the author plant doubt for the reader as to the adoption agency's credibility?
9. How does Jaden grow by the end of the story? What events contribute to his growth?

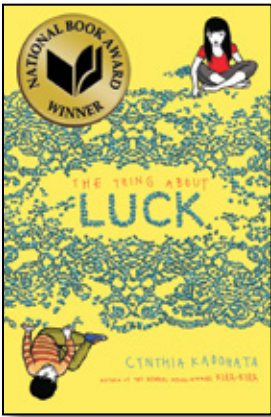
10. Identify a theme in the story and explain how the author develops the theme using events, details, and characters.
11. Describe Dimash. Why is Jaden drawn to him?
12. What happens to the baby that the family had planned to adopt and how is the family impacted by this news? Why does Penni have trouble bonding with the new infant? What concerns does she have about the new baby?
13. Who is Sam and what role does he play in the story? What advice does he give Jaden and why does he take him on a trip?
14. Choose a passage that paints a vivid picture of Kazakhstan. What words does the author use to create this picture?
15. What decision do Steve and Penni make about adopting a new baby? Why do you think they make this decision and how is Jaden impacted by this decision?

RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

These research and writing activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.6–8.2, 3, 7, 8) (SL.6–8.1)

1. Using your readings and class discussion from one of the prereading activities, work in a small group and conduct further research on one of the topics or themes shared in class. Use at least two credible Internet sources. Write a one-page explanation of your findings and cite your sources appropriately. Provide bibliographic information for each source.
2. Assume the character of Jaden and write a letter to his mother in which he describes his new life—his new parents and his new brothers. Share your letter in a small group. Justify the details in the letter in your discussion group by referencing evidence in the story.
3. Working either alone, with a partner, or in a small group, research the history of orphanages in the United States. Describe the living conditions for children in the early years and explain how orphanages evolved over time. Prepare a PowerPoint or multimedia presentation on your findings.
4. Identify three young adult and classic novels that feature orphans. Skim all three books and choose one to read in its entirety. Deliver either an oral book report on the book, create a diorama or other visual representation of the book, develop an advertisement for the book, and/or prepare a book talk for the class.
5. After having read a second book that features a child who has been separated from his/her family, compare and contrast this character with Jaden. You may share your comparison in class discussion and/or you may write an expository paper in which you describe how they are alike and different.
6. Symbolism is the use of the “tangible” to represent ideas, emotions, or qualities. For example, the US flag symbolizes freedom; a rose is often associated with love, etc. In *Half a World Away*, Jaden’s parents send him on an adventure where he experiences an “eagle in training.” In small groups, discuss what Jaden learns from this experience. Create a sketch to share with the class that captures Jaden’s experience with the eagle. Be prepared to discuss a) the symbolism surrounding the eagle; b) the role the eagle plays in the story; c) your thoughts as to why the author chooses the eagle as a symbol.





THE THING ABOUT LUCK

2013 NATIONAL BOOK AWARD WINNER

HC: 9781416918820
PB: 9781442474659
Ebook: 9781442474673

ABOUT THE BOOK

Summer and her family have had a really bad year. Just when family matters cannot seem to get any worse, her parents learn they must travel to Japan to care for elderly relatives, leaving Summer and her brother, Jaz, behind to spend the summer with their grandparents, Obaachan (grandmother) and Jiichan (grandfather). Money is tight and the mortgage has to be paid, so Summer and Jaz go on harvest with their grandparents. Summer's grandparents are old-fashioned and demanding, but Summer understands that they are aging and need help meeting their job responsibilities. Summer has a full load assisting her grandmother as a cook and entertaining her brother, who has trouble making friends. Along the way, she meets a boy and faces an ethical dilemma when her dog causes trouble on one of the farms. When rain threatens, she recognizes her grandfather's physical limitations and sets out to save her family's summer job. Summer's experience is a heartwarming story of growth and challenges.

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

These discussion questions and activities correlate to the following Common Core State Standards: (RL.5-7.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) (W.5-7.7) (SL.5-7.1, 4).

1. Describe a time in which a family event upset your regular routine. How did you deal with the situation? Looking back, would you do anything differently today?
2. Describe a time in which you had to own up to something that went wrong for which you were responsible. How did you handle the situation? How might you handle it differently today?
3. Reflect on a time in which you felt used and/or demeaned by a peer. What did you do? If you didn't handle it well, how might you better handle the situation now?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

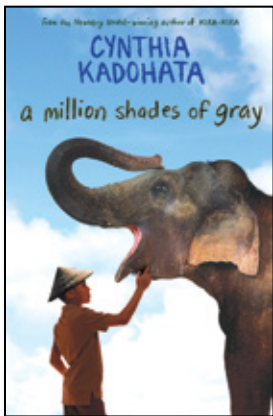
1. What is *kounn* and why does Summer reference it in the opening of the story?
2. Why is Summer not surprised when she learns that her parents must travel to Japan to care for aging relatives? Why might the author have this family emergency occur?
3. What happens to give Summer a fear of mosquitoes? Is her fear warranted?
4. Why does her brother not have friends? What do her grandparents do in an attempt to help him find a friend?
5. Describe the work Summer's grandparents sign on to do. What is a typical day like for Summer?
6. Are the Parkers good employers? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
7. How does Summer's opinion of Robbie Parker change by the end of the story?
8. Describe in depth Obaachan and Jiichan. How are they alike? Different? Support your explanation using their words, actions, and comments/thoughts about other characters.
9. Summer feels a tremendous amount of responsibility. In what ways does she feel responsible and why?
10. During her weeks off from school, Summer is required to write a book report on *A Separate Peace*. How does her written report reflect her character and her thinking process over time? Why do you think the author chose this classic book?
11. What events illustrate Summer's strength of character?

12. Why does Summer sneak out at night and run the combine? Describe her feelings about this work. What reaction does Mick have and why?
13. Thunder, the family dog, goes along on the harvest. What pivotal role does he play in the story? What conflict would be absent or would have to be presented differently if he were absent from the story?
14. Who is Mr. Laskey? Is he a responsible person? Is he likeable?
15. How does the author use humor to develop each character's voice? Support your answer with examples from the text.
16. How has Summer grown by the end of the story? How has her relationship and understanding of her grandparents changed? What about their understanding of her?

Further Discussion Questions / Activities

1. Identify at least one theme in the story. Discuss in small groups how the author develops this theme throughout the story. Summarize your discussion to a larger group.
2. Write three discussion questions about the story on index cards that you would like to talk about with your peers. Meet in a small group and discuss your questions. Refer to information in the text to support your conversation. Identify the one question that elicited the most discussion and share it with the larger class.
3. Choose any scene and rewrite it from another character's point of view. For example, rewrite one of the scenes in which the grandfather can no longer drive from his point of view. Share your rewrite with a small group. How does this different point of view impact the story? Use correct grammatical conventions in your narrative. (Instead of rewriting the scene, you may choose to retell the scene in a small group setting).
4. Research crops of the Midwest, harvesting procedures, or the causes of malaria, and present your findings with PowerPoint, another media form, or a written report to a larger group. Support your presentation with visuals.
5. Read another novel, a short story, or a poem with a migrant worker theme that contains a protagonist about the same age as Summer. What commonalities do you see between the two characters? What common struggles do they share?
6. Imagine a scene that would further develop one of the characters. Discuss the scene with a classmate. Why did you choose this scene and this character?





HC: 9781416918837
PB: 9781442429192
Ebook: 9781416998594

a million shades of gray

ABOUT THE BOOK

Y'Tin is brave. No one in his village denies that—his mother may wish that he'd spend more time on schoolwork than on elephant training, but still she knows that it takes a great deal of courage and calm to deal with elephants the way that Y'Tin does. He is almost the best trainer in the village—and, at twelve years old, he's certainly the youngest. Maybe he'll even open up his own school someday to teach other Montagnards how to train wild elephants? That was the plan anyway—back before American troops pulled out of the Vietnam War, back before his village became occupied by Viet Cong forces seeking revenge, back before Y'Tin watched his life change in a million terrible ways.

Now, his bravery is truly put to the test: he can stay in his village, held captive by the Viet Cong, or he can risk his life (and save his elephant's) by fleeing into the jungle. The Montagnards know their surroundings well. After all, this is why Y'Tin's village had become loyal US allies during the war, having been tapped by Special Forces for their tracking skills and familiarity with the jungle. But that also means that Y'Tin knows how unsafe it can be—and how much danger he is in if he chooses to head out with no destination in mind.

At once heartbreaking and full of hope, Newbery Medal–winning author Cynthia Kadohata's exploration into the depth of the jungle and the not-so-distant past brings us close to a world few people know about—and none will ever forget. Y'Tin's story is one of lasting friendships, desperate choices, and all that we lose when we are forced to change.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 2, 3, 5) (SL.6–8.1, 4)

1. Discuss Y'Tin's attitude toward school. Why is his mother so determined that he complete his education? Cite evidence that Y'Tin is willing to learn in spite of his rebellion against school.
2. When the North Vietnamese become a threat to the Rhade tribe, Y'Tin's family is forced to leave the village. Explain why Y'Tin suddenly wants to go to school when he no longer has to.
3. Y'Tin spends a lot of time daydreaming and thinking. He explains the difference to his mother: "Daydreaming is thinking about things that aren't true yet. Thinking is when you ponder matters that are already true." What truth does Y'Tin ponder the most? Which truth hurts the most? Debate whether Y'Tin's daydreams come true. Discuss Lady's role in helping Y'Tin realize his dream.
4. Y'Tin says that next to his father, Tomas is the man who he most admires. What is it about Tomas that Y'Tin admires? What causes Tomas to turn on Y'Tin? How does this change Y'Tin's admiration for Tomas? When do Tomas and Y'Juen become "we," casting Y'Tin aside? Y'Tin's father has always told him that the jungle changes a man. Debate whether it's the jungle that changes Tomas and Y'Juen or something else.
5. Y'Tin thinks a lot about betrayal. Debate whether the Rhade feel betrayed by the Americans. How do Tomas and Y'Juen have a different idea of betrayal than Y'Tin? Tomas and Y'Juen think that Y'Tin's father betrayed his people. Debate whether he was actually working on behalf of his people. Y'Tin says that he would rather die than betray his people. Discuss whether Tomas and Y'Juen would make that pledge.
6. Explain what Y'Tin's father means when he says, "We must use the jungle as a weapon."
7. Identify a memorable scene and explain how the scene contributes to a theme or the plot.
8. At the beginning of the novel, Y'Tin is a boy, and at the end he is a man. At what point does he realize that he has become a man? Y'Tin feels sad that he is no longer a boy. What does he miss most about childhood? What might Y'Tin say was the toughest part about becoming a man? Explain how Y'Tin changes as key events in the plot unfold.

9. Earlier Y'Tin refers to Tomas as a man. Discuss whether Tomas displays the qualities of manhood. How is Y'Tin a bigger man than Tomas and Y'Juen?
10. Fear overtakes the Rhade tribe as the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong threaten their village. Y'Tin's father tells him that he has to face what's happening. When Y'Tin says that he isn't scared, his father replies, "Then you're not thinking straight." Why is it important for Y'Tin to feel fear? How might fear keep Y'Tin focused and cautious? Discuss other times when Y'Tin comes face-to-face with fear. How does he deal with each situation?
11. Explain why Y'Tin's father calls the war the American War. Why are the North Vietnamese especially interested in men like Y'Tin's father? How does his father's work with the Americans make the entire Rhade tribe vulnerable?
12. Y'Tin's father worries that the North Vietnamese might capture Y'Tin, strip him of his identity, and put him in a reeducation camp. What do these camps teach? How might the North Vietnamese be more interested in someone like Y'Tin than in Tomas or Y'Juen? Discuss how these camps are really about revenge.
13. Y'Tin's father is a wise man and recognizes that different situations require different types of leaders. Describe Y'Tin as a leader. Why is he more qualified to lead in the jungle than Tomas or Y'Juen?
14. Y'Tin speaks a lot about fate, spirits, sacrifices, etc. How does he reflect the religion of his people? Explain the role of the village shaman. Y'Tin struggles to deal with the sudden anger and hatred that has filled his heart after the North Vietnamese bombs his village. Why does he think that lying on Lady's back will cleanse his heart? How are their spirits connected?
15. Identify a key theme that runs through the story and describe how the author uses details and characters to support and develop the theme throughout the narrative.





HC: 9780689865756
PB: 9781416998181
Ebook: 9781416998198

Outside Beauty

ABOUT THE BOOK

There's only one way Shelby and her sisters can describe their mother: she's a sexpot. Helen Kimura collects men (and loans, spending money, and gifts of all kinds) from all over the country. Sure, she's not your typical role model, but she's also not just a pretty face and nail polish. She is confident and brave, she lives life on her own terms, and her four daughters simply adore her. These girls have been raised outside the traditional boundaries. They know how to take the back exit. They know how to dodge crazed lovers in highway car chases. They do not, however, know how to function without one another.

Then suddenly they must. A late-night phone call unexpectedly shreds the family apart, catapulting the girls across the country to live with their respective fathers. But these strong-willed sisters are, like their mother, determined to live life on their own terms, and what they do to pull their family back together is nothing short of beautiful.

At turns wickedly funny and insistently thought-provoking, *Outside Beauty* showcases Cynthia Kadohata's unerring ability to explore the ties that bind.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 2, 3, 5, 6) (SL.6–8.1, 4)

1. Exploring the ties that bind a family is one of the major themes of the story. What are some of the expressions of closeness that the sisters display? Explain how the author develops this theme using events, details, and characters.
2. What are some of the characteristics the sisters share? What are some of their differences? Choose any one character and explain how she changes as the plot unfolds. What key events impact the character the most and why?
3. What adjectives would you use to describe Shelby? Marilyn? Lakey? Maddie? Helen? Support your choices with events or details from the story.
4. The impact of Helen's behavior on the sisters is complex. How does her attitude toward men shape the sisters' attitudes? How does her use of her beauty affect them?
5. How do the sisters view their mom's beauty? How do they reflect her values?
6. In many families the siblings take care of one another. Describe the relationship of Shelby and Maddie before they go to live with their fathers and then while they are separated. Using evidence from the story, explain how their relationship changes. What events have the greatest impact on their relationship and why?
7. How do the fathers relate to Helen now that they are no longer with her? How do they relate to their daughters? How do they relate to one another?
8. The discussion of marriage comes up many times in the story. How has their mother's desire not to marry affected the sisters?
9. Helen and the fathers are described as outsiders. Helen found each man through their shared loneliness. Have the sisters also become outsiders? Can they change? What evidence supports your answer?
10. Which sister is the most rebellious? Who is the most compliant? Who is the most motherly? Give examples that support your choices.

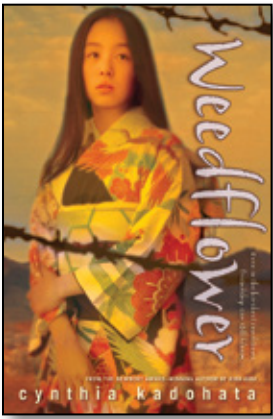
11. We learn both from our parents and from our surroundings. Do these characters reflect this? Give examples of what the sisters have learned from their parents. Now give examples of things they have learned from their surroundings. List some of the things the sisters have experienced because of their unusual lifestyle.
12. The isolation that the sisters felt when they were sent to their fathers' houses was both geographic and personal. With the technology available today, including cell phones, camera phones, and Internet with social networking sites, how might the girls' situation be altered?
13. How did the powwow process help the sisters communicate? Did this always work for them?
14. How does each sister view her mother? Her father? Herself?
15. What personality characteristics do the girls share with their fathers? How were Mack and Marilyn similar? Lakey and Larry? Shelby and Jiro? Maddie and Mr. Bronson? What character has changed the most in this story? Has any character remained unchanged?
16. Identify a central theme of the story and explain how the author supports and develops the theme with details, events, and characters.
17. Discuss the point of view. How would the story be different were it written from another point of view? Why do you think the author chose this perspective?

RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

These research and writing activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.4) (W.6–8.4, 7)

1. Did you understand the special language, *thetheguh*, that the sisters speak? Try writing a sentence using their special language. Have you ever made up your own language? Try making one up.
2. Diagram on paper the complex family tree of Shelby and her sisters. Include Helen, with all of the fathers, sisters, and any other brothers and sisters and spouses. How does this compare to a traditional family tree? Research the family tree of a famous individual. Prepare a small group presentation in which you talk about your findings.
3. Get a map of the United States and map the places mentioned in the story as the girls travel with their mom, when they are with their dads, and when they run away. Where do they end up? Choose one of the places identified in the story and research either the geography or culture. Write one or two paragraphs summarizing your findings.





Weedflower

“How could such a tragedy have occurred in a democratic society that prides itself on individual rights and freedoms?” —Milton S. Eisenhower

HC: 9780689865749
PB: 9781416975663
Ebook: 9781439132104

ABOUT THE BOOK

Twelve-year-old Sumiko lives on a flower farm in California, and dreams of owning a flower shop someday. She is the only Japanese-American girl in her class, and is often the victim of bigotry, but she feels tranquil when she is among the flowers. Then the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, and the United States government sends all Japanese and Japanese-Americans to internment camps. Sumiko and her family are sent to an Indian reservation in the Arizona desert where she discovers that the Indians resent them for taking over their land. Living conditions are poor and Sumiko no longer has the flowers to comfort her, but helping Mr. Moto, a lonely old man, plant a garden, and developing a friendship with Frank, a young Mohave boy, leads her on a journey of self-discovery and helps her realize the real reason that her grandfather left Japan for America long before she was born.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

This activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.6–8.1) (SL.6–8.1)

Ask students to write a paragraph about what they think racial and ethnic profiling means. Invite them to share their paragraphs in class. Engage them in a discussion about how Americans continue to practice ethnic profiling today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 2, 3, 4) (SL.6–8.1, 4)

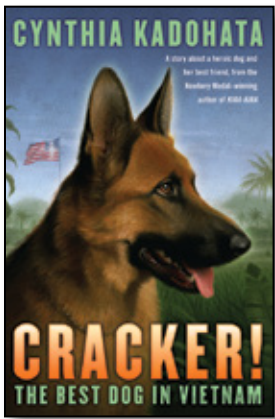
1. Explain the title of the novel. Support your explanation with examples from the story. Sumiko describes loneliness: (1) like everyone was looking at you (2) like nobody was looking at you (3) like you didn't care about anything at all (4) like you were just about to cry over every little thing. Trace Sumiko's feelings of loneliness throughout the novel. How does she learn to live with loneliness? Compare her feelings of loneliness at the beginning of the novel to her feelings about leaving camp at the end of the story. What other characters in the novel experience loneliness? Identify an additional theme or central idea in the story and explain how the author uses details and characters to develop it.
2. Sumiko is very excited when she is invited to Marsha's birthday party. Describe her entire family's reaction when she receives the invitation. Contrast the way Sumiko envisions the party and the way it really is.
3. Discuss the definition of *humiliation*. How is the scene at Marsha's party the ultimate humiliation for Sumiko? Why doesn't she tell Uncle and Jiichan that she was uninvited to the party? Why does she feel that she can tell Bull? What do you think Marsha feels when her mother sends Sumiko away?
4. Describe Sumiko's relationship with Tak-Tak. How does she protect him throughout the novel? Explain how each character changes and how their relationship is impacted as the plot unfolds.
5. Ichiro tells his family that the United States government may execute all the Nikkei if the war breaks out in Japan. Why does Auntie insist that he not discuss this at the dinner table? At what point in the novel does Sumiko begin to believe Ichiro's statement?
6. Ichiro heard that the FBI has been keeping records on Nikkei for a number of years. Why are Jiichan and Uncle of special interest to the United States government?
7. Jiichan described his trip from Japan to Sumiko: "The thing that kept everybody going was a single word: 'America.'" Why did Jiichan feel that the word *America* was the most important thing his family owned? How did America betray him?
8. Why does Sumiko feel more American than her cousins? How does she deal with living in two very different cultures? What part of her Japanese heritage does she reject the most? What rituals does her family practice that make her connect to her Japanese heritage? Explain how she takes this part of her life to the camp at Poston.

9. Explain what Jiichan meant when he told Sumiko: “The *haji* she felt was from her Japanese side and the anger was from her American side.” Cite passages or scenes in the novel when Sumiko feels *haji*. Why should the United States government feel *haji*?
10. Bull makes a speech on New Year’s Day. “You suffer so you can learn.” Discuss how Sumiko and her family suffer. What does Sumiko learn from her suffering?
11. Describe Sumiko’s friendship with Sachi Shibata. Why is Sumiko so willing to be Sachi’s friend when she knows that Sachi lies? Sumiko also becomes friends with Frank, a Mohave boy, and Mr. Moto, an older man who wants to plant a garden. “Friendship was really different from the way she had envisioned it all these years.” Discuss what Sumiko expected from a friendship. What does the term “unlikely friendship” mean? How are Sumiko’s relationships with Sachi, Frank, and Mr. Moto “unlikely friendships”? Discuss the symbolism of the moth. How is this symbolism relevant to the story as a whole?
12. Explain why the Native Americans resent the Japanese. Why is Sumiko more afraid of the Native Americans than the white people? What is her attitude toward both groups of people?
13. Why does the camp at Poston feel “final” to Sumiko? She doesn’t want to leave when Auntie finds a job in a sewing factory near Chicago. Why does Uncle Kenzo tell her that she belongs with Auntie? Explain why Sumiko feels like an orphan when she leaves the camp. How does leaving the camp help her understand the real reason why Jiichan came to America?

RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

These research and writing activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (SL.6–8.1, 4) (W.6–8.1, 4, 7)

1. Every Friday night at dinner, Uncle asks each member of the family to share anything special on their minds. Role-play a dinner conversation between Sumiko and her family on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed.
2. The Quakers were the only religious group speaking up for the Japanese. Research the Quaker beliefs, and write a letter to the editor of a newspaper that a Quaker might write in defense of the Japanese-Americans.
3. Sumiko describes the racetrack like the dioramas she had made in geography class. Make a diorama of the racetrack, the Poston Camp, or the flower farm where Sumiko lived.
4. Kadohata uses similes to create certain images (e.g., in reference to the neglected flower fields, “It was almost like watching an animal die and not trying to help”). Find other similes in the novel.
5. Mr. Muramoto had hosted a New Year’s Day party for twenty years. This year, there was no party. Plan a New Year’s Day party for Sumiko, Auntie, Tak-Tak, Ichiro, and Bull. Write a New Year’s resolution for each of these characters.
6. Sumiko and her family are Buddhists. Find out the fundamental beliefs of the Buddhist faith. Write a journal entry where Sumiko questions some of her Buddhist beliefs. Explain how your journal entries reflect Sumiko’s character using evidence from the story.
7. When Sumiko was in third grade she wrote a paper titled “Dirt.” Write the paper that Sumiko wrote. Share your paper in a small group and justify your content to the group, using evidence from the text.
8. The newspaper at the camp is called the *Poston Chronicle*. Ask students to write an article about one event at the camp that might be featured in the *Poston Chronicle*. For example: Mr. Moto’s garden, the Christmas celebration, etc.
9. Read about the Poston Camp (JAVADC.org/Poston.htm) and write a letter that Sumiko might write to Jiichan and Uncle about her life in the camp. Include remarks about what she will miss most about the camp when she moves with Auntie to Chicago.



CRACKER!

THE BEST DOG IN VIETNAM

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Cracker, a prized German Shepherd, once belonged to a boy named Willie, but now belongs to the US military, which has trained her to sniff out bombs, traps, and the enemy. She never believes that she will find a master as loving as Willie until she meets seventeen-year-old Rick Hanski, an army private in basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Rick enlisted in the military knowing that he would go to Vietnam, but he never intended to go as a dog handler. To U-Haul, Rick's sergeant, Cracker and Rick are an unlikely pair, but when they get to Vietnam, they become a team and are sent on dangerous search-and-rescue missions, often in the point position. In one deadly battle, Rick and Cracker are separated, and Rick receives a serious wound and a ticket home. When he arrives at his parents' house in Wisconsin, he finds that he is a changed man, and the only way that he can ever be at peace with himself is to be reunited with his best friend—Cracker.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

This activity aligns with the following Literacy in History/Social Studies Common Core State Standards: (RH.6–8.1, 3, 7)

Engage students in a discussion about the difference between a conflict and a war. Have students read a time line of the United States's involvement in Vietnam (PBS.org/BattlefieldVietnam/TimeLine/Index4.html). Using evidence from the time line and any credible source from the Internet, have students discuss the point at which the Vietnam conflict became the Vietnam War.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 2) (SL.6–8.1)

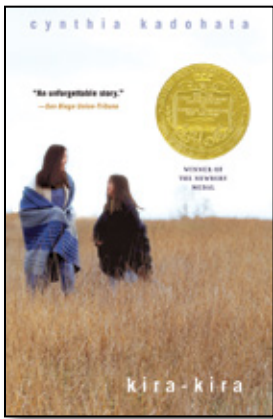
1. Willie knows that if he doesn't find someone to adopt Cracker, he will have to give her to the pound. Then he reads that the army needs dogs to go to Vietnam. Why is the pound worse for Cracker than going to war?
2. Discuss why Cracker is especially suitable as a war dog. Cracker's name as a puppy was Magnificent Dawn of Venus. How does Cracker live up to her original name? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
3. Rick's sister, Amy, graduated from MIT. His parents always felt that she had a "calling," but Rick, who wasn't a good student, was expected to work in the family's hardware store. Explain how Rick's jealousy of his sister's accomplishments contributes to his eventual success as a dog handler in Vietnam.
4. Why does Rick's father agree to sign the papers for him to join the army? Rick arrives at Fort Benning, Georgia, for basic training with an attitude—he wants to "whip the world." What is the toughest lesson Rick learns in basic training?
5. Discuss why Rick is written up for "lack of tact and diplomacy." What does Cracker teach Rick about diplomacy?
6. The military sees the war dogs as specialized equipment. How are the dogs trained? Discuss the difference between a scout dog and a tracker. Why is the military so interested in scout dogs?
7. In the beginning, it is doubtful that Cracker is going to make it through training. Why is Rick upset with the army for assigning him to Cracker? At what point does Rick realize that Cracker is indeed going to become "the best dog in Vietnam"? Using evidence from the text, trace the development of the relationship between Rick and Cracker. What events seem the most crucial to the development of their relationship? Why?
8. Willie used to feel invincible when he was walking with Cracker. How does Cracker make Rick feel invincible?
9. Rick is disappointed that he doesn't win a trophy at the end of dog training. Discuss how winning isn't always about getting trophies. How does Rick win in the end? What is Rick's ultimate trophy?

10. Rick’s parents taught him about fairness. Discuss the development of fairness as a theme throughout the story. What events and/or characters develop this theme?
11. How does basic training teach Rick about politics? Discuss how Rick uses politics to get Cracker returned to the United States.
12. Explain what the sergeant means when he says, “There are [Viet Cong] everywhere and nowhere.” Why does this idea make the Vietnam War an especially difficult one to fight?
13. Discuss Rick’s thoughts the first time he and Cracker are taken into a “hot zone.” How do he and Cracker become “dog and man—one creature”?
14. Rick is nervous when he and Cracker are sent on a secret mission. Discuss what Camel means when he says, “I wouldn’t want to go with anyone who wasn’t.”
15. Rick and Cracker are assigned the “point” position. Discuss how this is an especially dangerous position. How does “walking point” give Rick a sense of importance?
16. Rick sees courage, but he also feels it. What might he say is the most courageous act that he witnessed? Debate whether these acts of courage change his desire to “whip the world.”
17. What happens if Rick doesn’t read Cracker correctly? He says that a misread would make him feel guilty for the rest of his life. Discuss the relationship between responsibility and guilt. Describe Rick’s feelings of guilt when Cracker is lost. Why does Rick feel that he owes it to Cracker to wear his uniform when he goes to pick her up in Chicago?
18. Compare and contrast Cracker’s relationship with Willie and Rick. Discuss why it would have been difficult for Cracker to become Willie’s dog again. What makes Rick invite Willie to Cracker’s homecoming?
19. After basic training, Rick goes home for a visit before he deploys to Vietnam. Discuss why he doesn’t feel comfortable in his old room. When Rick returns from the war, he knows that he doesn’t belong in his parents’ house. How is this symbolic of his journey to manhood?

RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

These research and writing activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.6–8.2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

1. Ask students to read “Seeking to Honor America’s Four-Footed Soldiers” by Lisa Hoffman (VDHA.us/Content230.html). Then have them write a brief essay called “Dogs as Soldiers.”
2. *Stars and Stripes*, the daily newspaper for the US military, features news of interest to troops stationed all over the world. Write a feature story that might have appeared in *Stars and Stripes* about Cracker and Rick’s reunion. Include background information such as their training at Fort Benning and their missions in Vietnam.
3. Malaria is one of the infectious diseases that threatened the US troops in Vietnam. Refer students to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC.gov/Malaria/FAQs.html) for information about the cause and prevention of malaria, and how the disease is treated. Make a brochure that might have been given to the troops that answers some of their questions about the disease.
4. Willie’s favorite cousin, Derrick, was drafted, but Rick Hanski volunteered for the military. Find out about the military draft. When was it started? What was the purpose? When did the government abolish the draft? Look at the various Draft Board Classifications (Landscape.net/Draft.htm). What is significant about the draft lottery that occurred on December 1, 1969? Why is it likely that Rick would have eventually been drafted?
5. Willie’s father supported the Vietnam War, but his mother didn’t. Research the reasons why so many Americans disapproved of the war. Pick one point of view, and write an editorial that might have appeared in a major US city newspaper on April 30, 1975, the day the last American soldiers left Vietnam. Using peer feedback, edit your piece so that it can be displayed.
6. Take a virtual field trip to the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning, Georgia (NationalInfantryMuseum.org). Take notice of the exhibits that deal specifically with the Vietnam War. Write a letter that Rick might write to the commanding general of Fort Benning asking that a special exhibit be created to honor the dogs of the Vietnam War.
7. Design a postcard called “Soldiers of Democracy” that might be sold in the store of the Infantry Museum.



kira-kira

2005 NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Katie Takeshima is about to enter kindergarten in the 1950s, when her parents close their Oriental foods grocery store in Iowa and move to Chesterfield, Georgia, where her father works in a chicken hatchery and her mother works in a poultry plant. Uncle Katsuhisa helps them move into a small apartment complex where other Japanese families live, and they begin a long struggle toward saving money to purchase a house of their own. The working conditions are almost intolerable at the hatchery, and the Takeshima children experience prejudices at school, but the small community of Japanese families band together and support one another in their daily lives. Because Mr. and Mrs. Takeshima work double shifts, Katie and her younger brother, Sammy, are left in the care of their older sister Lynn. Katie believes that Lynn is a genius and listens as her sister encourages her to look beyond tomorrow. But there is no tomorrow for Lynn. When she is fourteen, and Katie ten, Lynn becomes ill with lymphoma and ultimately dies. At this point, the Takeshima family almost falls apart, but Katie remembers Lynn's special way of looking at life, and finds a way to show her parents that there is always hope and something glittering—*kira-kira*—in their future.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

This activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.6–8.2) (SL.6–8.1)

Kira-kira means “glittering” in Japanese. Ask students to write a one-page description of something that is *kira-kira* to them. Examples may include the ocean, stars, the moon, the morning dew on the grass, a dancer under a spotlight, etc. Invite them to share their writing in class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.6–8.1, 2, 3) (SL.6–8.1)

1. Mrs. Takeshima is troubled at how un-Japanese her daughters seem, and vows to one day send them back to Japan. Using evidence from the text, debate how difficult it was in the early 1950s to belong to one culture and live in another. Why is Mrs. Takeshima so fearful that her daughters will lose their sense of heritage? Discuss customs that the Takeshima family practices that demonstrate the family's loyalty to their native culture.
2. Katie describes her mother as “a delicate, rare, and beautiful flower.” Find examples in the novel that support Katie's description of her mother. How does Katie's relationship with her mother change throughout the story?
3. Discuss Katie and Lynn's relationship. Why does Katie feel that her parents like Lynn best? It is Lynn who tells Katie that they are moving to Georgia, and it is Lynn who tells her that their mother is pregnant. Why do Mr. and Mrs. Takeshima leave such important discussions up to Lynn? At what point do Lynn and Katie switch roles?
4. Describe the friendship that develops between Lynn and Amber. What does Katie mean when she says “Amber broke ranks and became Lynn's first best friend”? Why does Amber drop Lynn as a friend? Discuss why Katie is so hurt that Amber doesn't come to Lynn's funeral. Contrast Katie and Silly's friendship with Lynn and Amber's. Choose any one friendship and discuss how it advances and/or impacts the plot.
5. What is Uncle Katsuhisa's role in the family? Katsu means “triumph” in Japanese. How does Uncle Katsuhisa live up to his name? Katie finds it difficult to see that her father and uncle are brothers. Contrast their personalities. What does Mrs. Takeshima mean when she says that Uncle Katsuhisa “didn't look before he leapt”?
6. Hitting, stealing, and lying are the three worst crimes to Mr. and Mrs. Takeshima. How does Katie commit each of these crimes in the course of the novel? Discuss the scene where Katie steals pink nail polish for Lynn. How does she justify this crime to herself? Discuss why Katie's crime makes her mother feel that the family is falling apart.

7. Lynn wakes up crying one night and says that in her dream she is swimming in the ocean. How does this dream foreshadow her death? Discuss the symbolism of the brown moth in Lynn’s bedroom on the night she dies.
8. Describe the sense of community among the Japanese families in Chesterfield, Georgia. Mr. Kanagawa is considered the leader of the community. How is his leadership revealed in the novel? How does Lynn become the leader of the children in the community?
9. Prejudice is an underlying theme in the novel. Analyze how the author develops this theme throughout the novel. Take into account the first time that Katie experiences prejudice at the motel in Tennessee when her family is moving to Georgia, and Mr. Takeshima quietly takes the room in the back. Consider, too, Lynn’s role in helping Katie understand prejudice and the efforts mothers take to protect their daughters.
10. Discuss the meaning of the word “exploit.” How does Mr. Lyndon exploit the workers? Some of the workers are trying to unionize so that they can demand better working conditions. Mrs. Takeshima stays away from them because she feels that it is wrong to fight the people who are trying to help you. Why does she feel that Mr. Lyndon is trying to help them? Why do Mr. and Mrs. Takeshima decide to attend the pro-union meeting at the end of the novel?
11. Discuss how the trip to California helps Katie come to terms with Lynn’s death. How does she help her parents deal with their grief?
12. Discuss how the author uses events and characters to develop the concept of hope in the story.

RESEARCH AND WRITING ACTIVITIES

These research and writing activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (W.6–8.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7)

1. Mrs. Takeshima feels that her girls must return to Japan to learn about their femininity. Research the role of women in Japan today. Write a brief article that might appear in a book called *Women in Other Cultures*.
2. Brenda Swamp, named for a ten-year-old girl who died there, is near Chesterfield and is the subject of a local ghost story. Write and illustrate a story titled “Brenda” that Katie might one day read to Sammy. Read your story aloud in a small group. Listen as others read their stories and share one suggestion with each author for how he/she might improve his/her story.
3. Katie has to answer three questions about a story her class reads. Apply the same questions to *Kira-Kira* and write the answers in three paragraphs. After a peer edit session, revise your writing, paying particular attention to improving transitions.
4. Identify a theme in the story and write an essay illustrating how the author develops the theme through unfolding events and interactions between characters.
5. Write an essay in which you explain how a character changes throughout the story. Support your ideas using events from the story that impact the character’s behavior.
6. Katie notices that her parents work all the time and never take time to relax and have fun. Research the ritual of the Japanese tea ceremony (known as *chanoyu* or *chado*). Working with a small group, plan a tea ceremony that Katie might have for her parents.
7. Katie gives one of the eulogies at Lynn’s funeral but sits down before she tells a special memory of Lynn. Write about a special memory of Lynn that Katie might have included in the eulogy. Share your memory with others.
8. Silly Kilgore’s mother holds a pro-union meeting at her house at the end of the summer. Have the class plan this meeting. Instruct the speakers to point out the poor working conditions, long hours, safety issues, and low pay. Such meetings are only for the workers, but suggest that one student give a speech from Katie Takeshima’s point of view.
9. Lynn always wanted to go to the ocean in California. Write a haiku titled “*Kira-Kira*” that Katie might write and dedicate to Lynn after her family returns from the West Coast.
10. It is a Japanese custom to purchase souvenirs (or *omiyage*) from places they have traveled to. Write a description of a souvenir that Katie might bring from California to put at Lynn’s grave.

