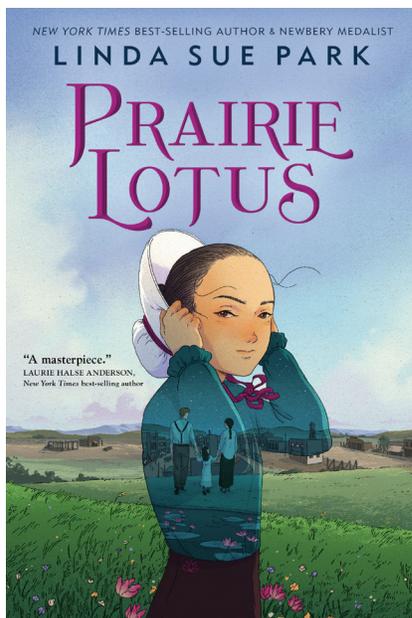


Prairie Lotus

by Linda Sue Park



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About the Book

Prairie Lotus is a powerful, touching, multilayered book about a girl determined to find her place and realize her dreams: getting an education, becoming a dressmaker in her father's shop, and making at least one friend. Acclaimed, award-winning author Linda Sue Park has placed a young half-Chinese girl, Hanna, in a small town in the Dakota Territory in 1880. Hanna's adjustment to her new surroundings, which means negotiating the townspeople's almost unanimous prejudice against Asians, is at the heart of the story. Narrated by Hanna, the novel has poignant moments yet sparkles with humor, introducing a captivating heroine whose wry, observant voice will resonate with readers.

About the Author

Linda Sue Park is the author of the Newbery Medal book *A Single Shard* and the *New York Times* bestseller *A Long Walk to Water*. She has also written several acclaimed picture books, fiction and nonfiction, and serves on the advisory board of We Need Diverse Books. She lives in Rochester, New York, with her family. Visit her online at lspark.com and on Twitter @LindaSuePark.

Discussion Questions

Prairie Lotus is a work of historical fiction. Did you enjoy reading it? Have you read other historical novels? Which ones? Do you think that plot, character and theme can make a historical novel interesting to readers who don't enjoy studying history? Did you like the main character, Hanna, even though she isn't a contemporary of yours? What are some of Hanna's characteristics, good or bad?

The history of westward expansion is most often presented in a positive light, without the full truth of the injustices done to the Native nations of North America by the United States. Hanna and her father are themselves settlers in LaForge, and thus are part of that terrible legacy. Think about the language usually used to describe westward expansion. Does seeing Hanna's perspectives on Native Americans and her Chinese heritage help show another side to the story? Discuss why it is important to view history from more than one perspective.

Because *Prairie Lotus* takes place in 1880, there may be terms in the story that you are unfamiliar with. Can you think of some examples? For example, what is a dry-goods store? A railroad town? Did you have any problems following the story because of these terms? Are these terms no longer in use because the things they describe have disappeared, or have we found new terms for them?

In the author's note, Linda Sue Park shares her childhood affection for the stories of Laura Ingalls Wilder, the Little House books—but also her painful adult awareness of their shortcomings, especially the racism that they portrayed. If you have read the Little House books, do you understand what she means about their shortcomings? How do you feel when you read a book that contains racism or other hateful content? Do you feel that Park has done a good job of depicting an Asian character in a white community?

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In the first chapter, one of the book's main themes is introduced when Hanna thinks, "But she already knew from living in California that most white people didn't like having neighbors . . . who weren't white themselves" (11). Share some scenes from the book where this statement plays out. Have you known this to be true in your life? Your school? Your community? How? Why do you think you think people still feel this way?

Hanna is determined to "sew her way into the hearts of the women of LaForge" (127). Why does she believe that her talent will earn her respect? How have you seen this happen in contemporary life? Do you believe that appreciating someone's talent will help people put their prejudices aside? What happens when people concentrate on the ways they are alike rather than the ways they are different? How do the townspeople of LaForge begin overcoming their prejudice of Hanna?

Talk about what some of the other themes of the book are (courage, respecting differences, family relationships). How does Park weave some of those themes into Hanna's story?

Talk about some of the book's scenes that show Hanna's courage—like when she walks into school alone on the first day. Have you ever had to do something like that? How did it make you feel? Yes, Hanna is brave, but what are the circumstances that require her to keep summoning her courage? What are some of the things that motivate her to keep being brave? Would it be hard for you to swallow your anger and stay calm, as Hanna often does?

On Hanna's second day of school, what does the teacher do that helps her feel included in the class? Try doing this with your class—share where you are from or about a place you've visited. What other things could you share that might highlight your commonality?

Park writes that the stories she invented as a child about the Little House world were "a pre-internet version of fan fiction" (249). She loved the setting and the characters, and with her imagination she made a place for herself in that world. What do you imagine your place could have been in Hanna's world? Is there a place or time in history or literature that you strongly identify with? When or where? What could be your place in that world?

Talk about some of the ways Hanna stays connected to Mama. Do you think Mama did a good job of preparing Hanna for some of the prejudice she has faces? What about the knowledge that "there were times when it was useful—*crucial*—to hide her thoughts" (87)? Do you agree with this advice? Is it helpful or harmful?

Do you agree with Hanna when she thinks, "The world was so often unfair, and she couldn't do a single thing about most of that unfairness" (81)? If you disagree, what things do you suggest can be done when you believe that something is unfair?

In addition to school, Hanna always seems to have work to do—sewing, housework, and cooking. How different is that from what is expected of you? How are expectations for kids today different than what they were in the past? Hanna works hard in part because she is determined to be an independent adult. Is this a motivation for you or your friends?

Papa says to Hanna about the Native Americans, "The land ought to go to people who work to improve it" (11). Do you think he really believes this, or is this just another excuse for racism? Why would Papa be racist when he has personally faced the injustice of prejudice about his family? How is it that anyone who has personally faced racism can exhibit racist behaviors themselves?

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Individual Activities: Creative Writing

Hannah's favorite "curse without cursing" is "Rotten eggs!" Invent ten non-curses of your own and use each one in a sentence. See if you can get one to go viral in your school!

Write an article for the LaForge newspaper about the opening of the new dry-goods store.

Try your hand at some fan fiction—choose a book or movie or TV show that you enjoy and write a short story placing yourself at the center of the action.

Individual Activities: Art

Design a flyer or a newspaper ad for the opening of the new dry-goods store. Don't forget to use the lotus!

Search the internet for issues of *Godey's Lady's Book* and browse some of the illustrations. Try your hand at designing a dress for an 1880s customer.

Hanna's class takes turns reciting poetry, and Hanna chooses "To My Mother" for her penmanship lesson. Discover two or three poems written before 1880 and practice your penmanship by writing them out in calligraphy. Be brave and present them to your class!

Individual Activities: Social Studies

Choose one of these subjects to research and write a report about:

- The history and symbolism of the lotus flower, including your thoughts about what it means to Hanna in the story
- The Homestead Act of 1862
- The Chinese Massacre of 1871
- The Sioux Treaty of 1868
- The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

This guide was written by Bobbie Scales.

Recommended Reading from Linda Sue Park

Below is a list of titles that provide a variety of views of U.S. history in the decades before and after Hannah's story. As a place to start for information on books about Native American/indigenous history, I highly recommend this page for teachers and educators on Cynthia Leitich Smith's website: cynthialeitichsmith.com/lit-resources/read/diversity/native-am/teaching/native_resources.

Fiction

Freedom's School by Lesa Cline-Ransome, illustrated by James Ransome

Elijah of Buxton by Christopher Paul Curtis

The Birchbark House series by Louise Erdrich

Supplemental teaching guide: files.harpercollins.com/HCCchildrens/OMM/Media/Chickadee_TG_FINAL.pdf

Longwalker's Journey by Beatrice Harrell

Under a Painted Sky by Stacey Lee

How I Became a Ghost and *When A Ghost Talks, Listen* by Tim Tingle

Crossing Bok Chitto by Tim Tingle, illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges

Escape to Gold Mountain by David Wong

Dragon's Gate and *The Traitor* by Laurence Yep

Nonfiction

Angel Island by Russell Freedman

Black Cowboys, Wild Horses by Julius Lester, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

The Star People, Gift Horse, Red Cloud, and many others by S.D. Nelson

Bad News for Outlaws by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

An Indigenous People's History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (adult title) or the Young Reader's Edition, adapted by Jean Mendoza and Debbie Reese

Asian Americans in the Old West by Gail Sakurai

Standing Bear of the Ponca by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve

My People the Sioux by Luther Standing Bear

The Chinatown War by Scott Zesch (adult title)