

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

So Far from the Bamboo Grove

by

Yoko Kawashima Watkins

Book Information

Yoko Kawashima Watkins, So Far from the Bamboo Grove

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183 Pages

Book Level: 4.7

Interest Level: MG

In this autobiography of survival, eight-year-old Yoko escapes from Korea to Japan with her mother and sister at the end of World War II.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books

Topics: Countries/Regions, Japan; Countries/Regions, Korea, North and South; History, Emigration/Immigration; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 6-8; READNOW - Renaissance Learning, RLI - High School (Theme: Tough Decisions); Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Wars, World War II

Main Characters

Corporal Matsumura a loyal family friend whom the Kawashimas meet in an army hospital

Hideyo Kawashima Yoko's brother, who has his own struggle for survival during his journey to locate his family

Ko Kawashima Yoko's older sister, who becomes the leader during the Kawashimas' flight

Mother Yoko's mother, who struggles to keep her daughters safe during their journey to Japan

Mr. Naido Yoko's only friend at the Sagano Girls' School

Yoko Kawashima the principal character in the story, who shares her family's struggle for survival after World War II

calligraphy beautiful handwriting; fine penmanship

communism societal system characterized by the absence of classes and by common ownership of the means of production and common sharing of labor and products

Communist a person who believes in communism

prestigious generally esteemed as a result of success, fame, or wealth

rucksack a knapsack

urn a vase used to hold ashes of a cremated body

yen basic unit of money of Japan

Synopsis

Yoko Kawashima dreams of being a writer, but her dreams are shattered when she is driven from her peaceful environment in Nanam, Korea, upon the invasion of Korean Communist soldiers. Her family is in danger because Mr. Kawashima works as a Japanese government official in Manchuria. They are warned by their family friend, Corporal Matsumura, to flee Korea immediately.

Mother decides to take her daughters to Japan to stay with her own parents. Forced to leave Hideyo, their son and brother, the family leaves a trail of notes for him along their journey in the hopes they will be reunited one day.

Yoko resents her bossy older sister, Ko, who pushes her to grow up during this time of crisis. Why does Mother allow Ko to act this way, Yoko wonders.

The Kawashimas spend countless nights hungry and without shelter as they follow railroad tracks, jam onto railroad cars, and pray the Korean Communists will not capture them. Yoko and her family live in constant fear of capture, rape, and death. It is only when the women reach Japan that there are moments of relief. In Kyoto, Mother enrolls the girls in school, and Yoko endures day after day of cruel teasing by her classmates. Later, she writes about their snobbish treatment and wins prize money in an essay contest.

After Mother's death, the girls truly learn what it

Vocabulary

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means to rely on each other as they move to a warehouse and use their own ingenuity to raise money for food. Corporal Matsumura reenters their lives and provides moral, and some financial, support. Eventually Hideyo finds his way home to his sisters.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

When Hideyo left for Seoul in the hopes of finding his family, he took an old family photo album with him. Why do you think he did this?

He realized the family might never be together again, and he wanted to preserve the memories.

Literary Analysis

How did Yoko change during the course of the story?

Answers might include the ideas that she matured, accepted responsibility, lost her innocence/childhood, and learned to appreciate her family and especially her sister.

Inferential Comprehension

How might Yoko's life be compared to that of Anne Frank, the young Jewish girl who hid from the Nazis during World War II?

Both girls were writers and adolescents; both had older sisters; both were being hunted; both saw horrific situations during their struggles for survival.

Constructing Meaning

Would you be prepared to leave your home in the middle of the night and flee to save your life? What would you take with you on your journey?

Answers are dependent on what each student feels is valuable for survival and emotional security.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is set during and after World War II and takes place mostly in Korea and Japan. Many countries were involved in World War II. Have students identify the countries involved and the political position they took during the years of the war. Students can study the reasons for the war, the history behind the Communist Party, and the driving force behind Japanese anti-Communists. Have students create a time line of events before, during, and after the war. How do they relate to Yoko's plight? What other groups of people were in danger during the war? Students can include an illustrated map of Yoko's travels.

Understanding Literary Features Throughout the story, there is a constant theme of survival. Yoko and her family live in constant fear and worry. They are haunted by the graphic realities of war at each corner they turn. Through it all they remain optimistic they will find their lost relatives. Lead a discussion about war-time survival. What would students do if they faced similar problems? What are the injustices depicted in the story? How would students go about searching for a missing relative? How would living through a war change their lives? Have students illustrate or respond to one scene that vividly stands out in their minds.

Understanding Characterization The story can be compared to *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which tells of another young girl struggling to survive during World War II. Have students read or watch a video of Anne's story and compare Yoko's struggle with Anne's. What are the differences? What are the similarities? Identify the political groups each girl is running from. What happens to each girl in the end? How are the girls themselves similar? How are they different?

Understanding the Author's Craft The story is mostly told by Yoko. Have the class rewrite a section of the story from Ko's point of view. How might it be different in the eyes of someone a few years older than Yoko? Students might also write

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a new ending, where Father returns to find his
wife dead and his children alive.