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Laurence Yep

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"This poignant, gently humorous novel is about prejudice and acceptance....15-year-old Joan Lee is a child of two worlds. As a Chinese American, she has never felt her separateness more than now, in 1927, in this new place in West Virginia. Only Miss Lucy, their landlord and neighbor, seems welcoming....There's nothing coy about Yep's portrait of prejudice, which he sketches from several angles."--Booklist. "A pleasure to read, entertaining its audience even as it educates their hearts."--Horn Book.

The Star Fisher Details

Date : Published May 20th 1991 by HarperCollins (first published January 1st 1991)

ISBN : 9780688093655

Author : Laurence Yep

Format : Hardcover 160 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Young Adult, Fiction, Cultural

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Chalice Neipp says

So well written! A Chinese-American moves from Ohio to West Virginia in search of the American dream during the late 1920's. The story beautifully illustrates the prejudices not of the immigration culture, but also those from "the wrong side of the tracks" (which the children will learn all about that phrase!). There is a Chinese fairy-tale (The Star Fisher) that is told near the beginning and throughout the book you get to see how that story influences and inspires this family. This is a wonderful story of hope, culture, and what it means to be a friend. Such a small little book with a huge impact. I love this author and will be reading more from him.

Gale says

FISHING FOR STAR FISHERS--EVEN IN AMERICA!

Fifteen-year-old Joan, a Chinese-American girl from Ohio, travels to a rural village in West Virginia in 1927. This daring move makes her family the first Chinese people this town has ever seen. She and her parents immediately discover how odd they are as viewed by prejudiced bums and snobby schoolmates. The Lee family has staked everything on this gamble to unknown territory--without any extended family to help--where they plan to open a laundry business, as they did in Ohio. Will the townsfolk flock to this new establishment, or continue washing their own dirty shirts?

The first week is a terrible strain on both the parents but especially for Joan, suffering the pangs of teenage acceptance at school and justified rebellion at home. Deeply hurt by rejection from the town in general and a snobby clique at school, Joan feels she just can't fit in, and will never be accepted, although she is praised by her teachers. Then too, she makes a tactical error by befriending a red-headed outcast from a family of Performers! Despite repeated vandalism and hate slogans on their fence, the Lee family refuses to give up and leave. Can a gracious, retired school teacher, with no family of her own, be accepted and adopted by suspicious Chinese parents--who refuse to accept charity from their own, kind landlady? How far will adults and even their children go to keep from becoming objects of town ridicule or bringing shame upon their family's strict code of honor? We mark Joan's budding maturity, as she recognizes that she is not the only Star Fisher (reference to a Chinese Folktale which is presented in detail) in town. An excellent introduction to culture clash in the USA.

(October 13, 2011. I welcome dialogue with teachers.)

Tibby (she/her) says

This one was a DNF for me. I had a really hard time getting into the story so I gave up.

From my perspective there were two things going on that made me put the book down after about 50 pages. The first was it felt really predictable. Foreign family moves to small, racist town. After struggling with a few town bullies they find some allies and the town grows in acceptance. Bullies are put in their place and

their power is taken from them. This is silly, because the story is actually based on Yep's mother's experience growing up. And if that's true, that makes it original and authentic. Still, it was hard as an adult reader to get past that predictability.

Second, the book read like something you would be required to read in an English class. Probably a middle school English class. The incidents and the story arc all lend themselves perfectly to discussions about history, racism, theme, overshadowing, etc. etc. I couldn't tell if this was just Yep's style of writing or if the book was dated, as if there was a period in the 90s when books felt stripped down and a bit didactic. Because of the origins of the story and the calibre of the author I would say this would be a great book for poring over in English class.

I don't think I'll keep it in our chapter book section. Largely because I don't think it's the kind of book a kid is going to pick up and it would take just the right reader to keep reading it if they did. We just don't have the space to hang on to books like that. I'm rather disappointed because Joan and her siblings are American born, but get that question "Where are you from?". This is such a timely issue right now as is racism and race.

Tasia says

The language is beautiful and clear. What I appreciated most is how Yep is able to discuss racism and the realities of its consequences while still maintaining an age-appropriate narration (not saying exactly what the racial slurs are, for example, but not shying away from their existing). This is a very valuable story, especially for those middlegrade readers.

We do have a tendency, though, to give them stories grounded in reality, yet are sometimes lacking in quality. This will ease young students into the realities of American history while keeping them engaged with vibrant language. Much better than some others I've read lately.

Melissa says

This was one of my very favorite books when I was a little girl. I think I picked it out as a prize for a summer reading contest at the local library, but my mother may have bought it for me at the library book sale. There were so few books about Asian girls, this may have been the only one available, and it opened a world for me. I loved the fairy tale or folk legend at the heart of it, and it opened my eyes to what life must be like for an immigrant. I recognized in it my own complicated relationship with my mother, the poverty she grew up in, and the shame a family hides from the outside world. A wonderful book. Everyone should read it!

08kassadyw says

The Star Fisher by Laurence Yep

Takes place in Clarks Burg, West Virginia, 1927. The characters are hard workers kind of stubborn (Parents) they are new neighbors and different from the others in the state they are known as weird strangers because they are Chinese. Joan lee is telling the story in the book. Joan and her family moves to Clarks burg, West Virginia. People treat them different because they haven't seen Chinese people in their town before, except

this one lady named Miss Lucy their next door neighbor. The town gets to know them and finally see them as nice people and sees that they are really not different from them. What I did not like about this book is that the town judged them about their appearance and looks, they didn't even get to know them to see if they were good people or not. I love this book it shows a lot of feelings.

Jillian says

This is the first book I've read of Yep's and he is a very pleasant writer. It was well-paced and a quick, engrossing read with delicate, vibrant metaphors. I did learn some cultural information, which was fun. For example, I enjoyed the star fisher story and how it tied in. The bit when the mom says that she wishes Americans used the months in the womb as part of a person's age was interesting, as I have always wondered why we don't do that and it was fun to find out that the Chinese do! (Of course, they also went into some detail about why a family like theirs would have tried to make it in America, which was informative and helpful in garnering sympathy for their plight, but then also unfortunately later implied more than once that apparently families like theirs just want to use Americans for their money so then they can eventually go back to China better off than they were when they left.)

I would like to give it a higher rating, but there were some inconsistencies that twinged me, mostly because I felt it did not give a consistent character build to the parents, and a couple other things that are worth pointing out because they contradict with what I think is meant to be the spirit of the book.

With regard to inconsistencies, on the train ride, Joan discusses how her dad is the cheerful one that always says yes to things whereas her mom is a little harder on them. But, the first night in West Virginia, their father won't let them eat dinner with Miss Lucy because he doesn't want to accept handouts from someone who claims to be a teacher and also an American, but when Joan's brother and sister want to eat at their friends' houses the next night, their father says yes. So now he is okay with them getting handouts from people who are even more strangers to them than Miss Lucy is? Then, Joan thinks to herself that she wished they'd asked their mother for permission instead because she would have said they couldn't eat at their friends' houses, even though their mother was the one who argued with the father the night before, wanting them to eat with Miss Lucy so the children don't go hungry. So, now she suddenly wouldn't be okay with them getting a decent meal? So much so that when Miss Lucy comes over with leftovers that same night, the mother, after YET AGAIN burning the rice (more on that later), tells Joan to tell Miss Lucy to take the leftovers away and they don't accept charity--after (as I mentioned above) just giving a passionate speech to the father the night before that he should have let them eat with Miss Lucy because their children are starving. Whuuu...

Another inconsistency is that I am confused about the Americanization of Joan, Emily, and Bobby's names. Both of their parents seem traditional enough that they would give their children traditional Chinese names. It would have been nice if that had been addressed more.

I understand that these inconsistencies may have been done purposefully to show their struggle with wanting to keep their heritage while still being accepted, especially considering Joan's endless waffling about how to think about her mother, but they were pretty glaring and so hard to ignore.

Moving on to other areas where I felt the book was a little off, while it is mostly understandable that her parents speak Chinese in front of other people because their English is so limited, I felt it was rude when

Joan and Emily were speaking in Chinese to each other in front of Miss Lucy when she had them over for tea. As a general rule, it's not nice to have furtive side conversations (no matter how innocent) in another language in front of people who can't understand you, excluding them like that. I felt that Miss Lucy was a lot more patient about that than was realistic, and also about when they broke her cup, which I saw coming from a mile away.

I'm not sure if it was intentional, but their father and mother are nearly as racist to Americans as the Americans are to them. At some point in the book it is kind of addressed when they talk about how many kinds of racism there are and how they are intertwined, but not to my satisfaction. They are constantly calling Americans stupid and lazy and spoiled behind closed doors (which doesn't even include when the father insults Miss Lucy right to her face in Chinese!), but it's not okay for someone to spray paint rude things on their fence or call them names because it's out in the open? That doesn't sit well with me. If this book is meant to lend sympathy to other races trying to fit in in America, I am not sure if this lesson in the father's (or the mother's) intolerance is purposeful or if we're meant to just be okay with the fact that it's okay for them to badmouth people in their own language behind closed doors, all the while they are desperate for money from people who openly deface their property. Essentially what I learned from the book is that we're all racist and also we're all misunderstood and so that's why we should tolerate each other in person but we can say whatever we want about each other behind our backs, LOL.

The mother's inability to cook was also irritating, although it was clear from the start that it would be the *deus ex machina* of this book, the thing that makes them finally be accepted. I could see the mother not understand pie-making, but the fact that, as a Chinese woman, she could not even make rice (which is essentially akin to boiling water!) was a little out there for me. And, it's not that she's a bad cook, it's that she wanders off, leaving pots unattended on the stove so of course the rice will burn once all the water has boiled off! I don't understand why no one points this out to her, even her youngest child Emily, who is quite the spitfire, especially since the mother is wasting what little food they have (you would think the mother would be more conscientious).

Barbara Radisavljevic says

Laurence Yep often writes about the friction that happens in Chinese American families when the parents were born overseas and the children were born in the United States. Whereas the family bond is still strong between parents and children, the parents are often less flexible in adapting to a more casual and less structured American lifestyle than their children, and the children often get impatient with the Chinese "old ways" that their parents cling to. This friction surfaces again in *STAR FISHER*, set in Clarksburg, Ohio, in 1927, as Joan Lee adapts to being part of the first Chinese family to live in this town. Her parents have decided to open a Chinese laundry, but there is much prejudice against them at first, and they are reluctant to allow others to help them. Finally the persistence of a caring landlady in finding a way to help while letting the Lee family "save face" paves the way for the Lees to become a real part of the community, and a pie social at a local church plays an important part in helping the community view the Lees as people worth getting to know. This book should have a place in unit studies that deal with immigration, racial prejudice, and friendship across social and cultural barriers.

Pernia Hassan says

Joan, her younger sibling and parents move from Ohio to West Virginia in 1924. Her family is poor and have opened their laundry. Their landlord is kind and befriends the girls. She is the former teacher and is the town's piano teacher.

Joan Kong's to fit-in but is teased because she is Chinese-American. Her parents have racist sayings painted on the fence in front of their laundry. Joan befriends Beatrice - also an outcast because her family are theater performer. Prejudice is examined from many different perspectives.

When Joan's mother accepts help to learn how to cook, she baked a nice pie for a church social. That seems to gain acceptance and approval of the members in town. Chapter 13 is the pie baking part. Also a good message about growth mindset.

Aminah G says

I finally decided to read this book and it was pretty good.

The Star Fisher is about a 15 year old girl named Joan. Both her parents were born in China but Joan and her two younger siblings were born in America. This book is full of humor and a family trying to be accepted. I loved it.

What I didn't like

The fact that she is Chinese seemed to rub his one man the wrong way. He called Joan it like she wasn't human. "it can speak English." the man had said. I found that very offensive. Joan was just trying to fit in, in her new home. But it's kind of hard when stupid idiots are painting mean words in your fence. That man was ignorant and just plain rude. But Joan didn't let that stupid oaf get to him which I liked.

What what liked

The story was well written and I loved it. I recommend it.

Bernadette says

First, I loved the fact that Yep put the English dialogue in italics! It makes the story so much more real and I loved knowing when the characters were speaking each language. Yep also describes the differences in relationships between the different ages. Through the story of the mother and father's immigration, I learned about the history of China. My favorite part of the book though was the humor and the characterization! I laughed out loud several times at the honest thoughts and replies of the characters. I also thought that the difficulties of the mother-daughter relationship were pretty universal and something all girls may relate to. I also liked how Yep brought up the topic of prejudices in general and how all people, regardless of race, may be subject to the hatred and ignorance of others. A beautifully written book that would teach students about part of American history, as well as about the struggles that Chinese immigrants faced and lead to thoughtful discussions about prejudice! Students may enjoy putting themselves in these characters' shoes and deciding what they would have done in similar situations.

Emily says

Pages: 147

Age range: 10 and up

Genre: Novel / Historical Fiction

Race/Culture/Ethnic Group: Chinese American

Summary: The Star Fisher is the story of fifteen year old Joan Lee and her family in 1927 – the year they move from Ohio to West Virginia where her father plans to open a laundry. Joan and her family struggle against the discrimination of several townspeople and also with the generational and cultural divide between Joan and her siblings, who were born in American, and her parents, who were born in China.

Evaluation: Although Yep is a respected and renowned author of children's books, I have only read one other book by him and thought this would be an excellent opportunity to read another. In the preface to the story, which is written at the same reading level as the story itself, Yep, who is Chinese American himself, explains that the characters and the story are based on stories he heard of and from his grandmother while growing up.

While there are some common themes in the novel – dealing with the prejudice of the townspeople and the tension between generations – the fact that the novel is set in West Virginia rather than in a Chinatown makes it unique. Joan is a believable character with a strong voice whose story is enjoyable to read. As in The Magic Paintbrush, Yep incorporates a Chinese folktale into the story as well as delicately and effectively illuminating several aspects of Chinese/Chinese American culture, life and history.

I would recommend this book to anyone who had read and enjoyed L. Yep previously. Again, I would probably also recommend it to readers of the Dear American (and other) series, since it has some similar themes and is told in a first person voice of a 15 year old girl, much like many of the diaries.

Rena Jane says

Read this because it was recommended as tolerance literature as a prelude to discussing 9/11 with my students.

It's a beautiful book. Simply and well written, as well as a timeless story of the difficulty of a newcomer fitting into a small community. In this case, the newcomers are not only new to the small town they move to, but to American culture in general. They are Chinese immigrants, although their children, who tell the story, the oldest daughter, Joan, specifically, was born in the U.S.

Surprising and pleasant is the fact that many of the characters are three-dimensional people. Good and goody-goody, alike. Even the antagonists are given realistic presentation.

A great book for teaching tolerance, and a good read for anyone of any age.

Jonathan H says

In The Star Fisher by Laurence Yep I believe that author's central idea is that no matter how far from home

you are there will always be someone to look out for you. I have come to understand through reading this book that even in the newest and strangest places there is someone who will be there for you. This book takes place in the spring of 1927 in West Virginia. 15-year-old Joan Lee and her family are moving from Ohio. Joan and her two siblings, Emily her younger sister, and her younger brother Bobby were born there. However, her parents were born in China. This book is told through the eyes of Joan Lee. As the one of the first group of immigrants migrating from China over to the "Golden Mountain" (America) they face racism and many hardships. The Lees own a laundry shop, but do not yet have any customers. The only people who go to their laundry go to graffiti racist phrases on their walls. Joan's parents do not even have enough to give Joan and her siblings a proper lunch. The Lees are outsiders to the narrow-minded townspeople. At school, Joan battles close-minded children who act like their parents. When Joan meets Bernice, she will finally find some good in the town. Bernice doesn't look at Joan as a monkey, but instead as a friend. At home the family's battle is between the family's traditional Chinese customs and between the new, strange American ways. Miss Lucy's, their land lord and the nicest person in town helps the family and tries her best to get the Lees accepted into the community. With her help the Lees will fight with courage for equal treatment, and the American dream.

This book took place in a fascinating time in American history. All the details in this book I can relate to and was written very realistically. They don't have much money, but work hard and own a laundry. Mama is very superstitious like my grandparents. My family also came over from China in the early nineteenth century. For this I really like this book and I could easily relate to it. As a reader I came to understand that coming to America for any immigrants especially if you looked different was not easy. This book reminded me of my mother's family, who also owned a laundry shop and valued the traditional Chinese culture while still trying to fit in in a small town. Very ironically my father who was born in Taiwan grew up in West Virginia in a small town where no other Chinese lived. His stories of hardship, facing racism, and being different really made this book special to me. I honestly thought this book was written about my family and me. Even the character's names were the same as my mother's siblings. My mom's name is Emily. She also has a brother and father named Bobby. This book was moving and exposed how it was to be new in America. This book moved fast and definitely kept me interested. The only weakness is that it was not long enough and it left me wanting more pages. I think anyone can enjoy this book no matter their race, but it will really relate to a Chinese-American.

Katryana says

i thought it was a good book and i took a test on it and i did very well.
