

WHAT TO KNOW about Cynthia Kadohata



Cynthia Kadohata was born in Chicago in 1956. Like the variety of settings in her fiction, Cynthia has lived in Chicago, Georgia, Arkansas, and California as a child. As a grownup, she has lived in Boston, Pennsylvania, and New York. She has lived in Southern California since 1990. Cynthia attended school at the University of Pittsburgh and Columbia Univer-

sity. She was first published in *The New Yorker* and subsequently published ten books for children and three for adults, beginning with *The Floating World*. She is the winner of the 2005 Newbery Medal for *Kira-Kira* and the 2013 National Book Award for *The Thing About Luck*. Her many hobbies include adopting and loving Dobermans and serving as a team manager for her son's youth hockey team. For more information, access cynthiakadohata.com/

QUESTIONS: *A Place to Belong* (2019)

Access a short excerpt of *A Place to Belong* [here](#) (from Chapter 9).

- How does this excerpt reflect that Hanako is only 11 or 12 years old in the story?
- What is the difference between her expectations of Hiroshima and the reality she sees?
- How is Hanako's reaction to the devastating scene different from her little brother Akira's?
- The powerful image of Hanako looking out the train window at the destruction of Hiroshima is one of the few illustrations in the novel. How do illustrations affect our reading of works like *A Place to Belong*?

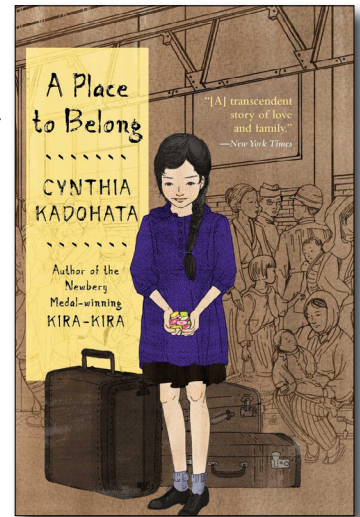
Hanako imagines the people harmed by the atomic bomb: "There were probably so many ways to die in destruction like this. It was

strange, she could almost see it, the moment it happened."

- Why might Kadohata have included Hanako's vivid imagining of the scene, and what does it mean that she has to "turn away?"

This section of Kadohata's novel moves from the personal to a universal or global experience of war. By the end of this passage, Hanako is considering the toll of war, including on "Americans and Japanese and Germans and everybody else in the war."

- What conclusions does she seem to reach?



MAKING CONNECTIONS

- Hanako's family in *A Place to Belong* is affected by the Denaturalization Act of 1944, which "encouraged" Japanese American people to denounce their citizenship and return to Japan. The book calls into question the rights of citizenship. How is this same conversation ongoing in the United States today?
- Many novels are set in war-torn locations: *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien, Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway, etc. How do works set in locations disrupted by war help us "see" or better understand the violence that may seem far away to many readers?
- In *A Place to Belong*, Kadohata describes how Hanako (of Japanese heritage but raised in the United States) feels out of place when her family returns to Japan and she begins school there. Another work by Kadohata, *Kira-Kira*, describes Japanese-American Katie's discomfort as a child relocating and settling into life in Georgia. Tranhha Lai's *Inside Out & Back Again* shows how Hà feels similarly out of place as a Vietnamese immigrant attending school in Alabama. These Asian American authors have in common that they create sympathy for and understanding about the immigrant or marginalized experiences of young characters. What do such novels suggest about being an "outsider?" What other texts have you read that are doing similar work?

ADDITIONAL READINGS

George Takei, *They Called Us Enemy* (2019)
 Isao Takahata, *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988)
 Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (1973)

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- Sigma Tau Delta's annual Convention invited members of City of Asylum to speak at our event. City of Asylum provides sanctuary to writers and artists in exile from their own countries, much like Hanako and her family. Are there ways to use books from writers in exile to promote community discussions about sanctuary and safety? What can you do on your campus or in your chapter to highlight the work of exiled writers and individuals?
- As we discuss Banned Books and the need to protect libraries and readers, what is our responsibility to the writers of such books? How might we honor those artists who risked their lives with words? How can we serve their missions in our professional and personal lives?
- With May being Asian/Pacific Heritage month, how might your chapter celebrate? How can Cynthia Kadohata's books help create a chapter or community activity to promote AAPI lives and accomplishments?

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

[ACLU, Immigrants' Rights](https://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights)
[Asianpacificheritage.gov](https://asianpacificheritage.gov/)
[PBS, Children of the Camps \(Internment Camp Timeline\)](https://www.pbs.org/childrenofthecamps/)
 United States National Archives: [World War II Japanese American Incarceration: Post-War Legacy](https://www.archives.gov/wwii/japanese-american-incarceration/)
[Stop AAPI Hate](https://www.stopaapihate.org/)