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Paper Wishes



Synopsis

Ten-year-old Manami did not realize how peaceful her family's life on Bainbridge Island was until the day it all changed. It's 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and Manami and her family are Japanese American, which means that the government says they must leave their home by the sea and join other Japanese Americans at a prison camp in the desert. Manami is sad to go, but even worse is that they are going to have to give her and her grandfather's dog, Yujiin, to a neighbor to take care of. Manami decides to sneak Yujiin under her coat and gets as far as the mainland before she is caught and forced to abandon Yujiin. She and her grandfather are devastated, but Manami clings to the hope that somehow Yujiin will find his way to the camp and make her family whole again. It isn't until she finds a way to let go of her guilt that Manami can reclaim the piece of herself that she left behind and accept all that has happened to her family.

Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

I had the immense privilege of reading an ARC of PAPER WISHES in exchange for my honest review. But I want to warn you before you pick up this book—which you will, if you know what's good for you—to have a big pile of tissues ready. I don't make these kinds of statements lightly. Over the course of this wee little novel, I sobbed probably five or six

times—big, gulping sobs, the kind that sends big, fat, raindrop-tears streaming down your face like Alice about to drown herself. That kind of sobbing. But I am probably the prime target audience for this novel: I'm a Dog Person with capital letters, and I have always found the story of Japanese internment in America—and the way in which we gloss over it in our history books—particularly compelling and heartbreaking. Our heroine, ten-year-old Manami, loses her ability to speak after the family dog, Yuujin, is taken from her. Understandably! The responsibility of having lost her grandfather's beloved pet racks Manami with intense guilt. After relocating, the family is living only on what they could fit into their suitcases. Packed in close with hundreds of other strangers, tension rises among the camp's population. Manami's only refuge is her kind, empathetic school teacher, who encourages her to paint her feelings onto paper to express what she cannot express with words. But it's really Minami's best friend, Kimmi, who kept this novel from breaking me into a thousand tiny pieces. Kimmi relentlessly understands what Manami is going through, and why she can't speak; Kimmi never demands, or stifles, or encroaches on the space Manami so clearly needs. I love a good female friendship story, and PAPER WISHES delivers. With simplistic, and yet gorgeously poetic prose, Sepahban weaves an emotional story of artistic discovery and self discovery against the backdrop of one of the lowest moments in American history. She navigates family turmoil with aplomb. But most importantly, PAPER WISHES is a novel about how hard it is to forgive—especially to forgive one's self. A delight for readers of any age, but ideal for middle-grade readers, classrooms, and history curriculums. PAPER WISHES is a novel that will get readers thinking, and to know more about this dark period in our past.

As a 9-12 year old, I couldn't read enough historical fiction set during World War II. I'm not sure what it was about that era, or if maybe there was just a ton of historical fiction output during my formative years set during WWII, but it became a time period that fascinated me, as heartbreaking and challenging as it must have been for so many at the time. Publishing moves through cycles and it seems that historical fiction is not so trendy these days, as I feel like I see fewer and fewer historical fiction books in the New Books section at the bookstore. It's a shame because these books are so necessary if we wish to learn from history. They help us better understand where we came from, and how those events have shaped today. PAPER WISHES begins with a girl and her dog Yuujin and her grandfather. Born on Bainbridge Island off the coast of Washington state, Manami knows only her peaceful, rural, seaside home, where she lives with her parents and grandfather, her two older siblings off to college in the Midwest. But everything changes one day at

school. Whispered rumors. And returning home to learn from her parents, with little explanation, that she and her family have no choice but to leave. Along with all of the other Japanese-Americans, they are sent to the mainland and then further inland, to an internment camp, where they are housed in barracks, regarded with suspicion. In the process, Manami is forcibly parted with Yujiin, who she was supposed to leave behind, but who she sneaks along for the journey. The other parting is Manami's choice. In the moment and the days that follow, she loses her voice. Sepahban's spare, poetic, and economical prose is perfectly suited to this story and this age group. Chapter breaks mark each month as time marches on in the internment camp, where everything is parched and Manami, quieted. Her heartbreak over the loss of Yujiin is palpable, and will move many readers, child and adult alike, but it's her eventual recovery that got the tears to spill over for me. PAPER WISHES couldn't be more timely or necessary, with a current presidential candidate with a unforgivable and deep misunderstanding of Executive Order 9066. My nephew, himself Japanese-American and close in age to Manami, was asking me the other day about good guys and bad guys, asking for confirmation that "bad guys" aren't real . . . they're just in the movies. I didn't know how to answer -- the question was so big and I'm not his parent -- but I told him, "real bad guys usually don't look like the ones in the movies." PAPER WISHES, already the recipient of two starred reviews, has been lauded with so much love, but I have to give it a little more. You can't say this about every book, and of course, it depends a bit on the reader, but this book is *important*. I can't think of a better choice for classroom read-alouds. Many, many children will learn and experience so much from this book, without ever feeling like they are being taught.

Rating: 3.5/5 You know what? A book about a kid getting sent to a prison camp isn't sad enough. Nope, nope, nope. In order to make it truly sad, you have to pry the kid's beloved pet away from her while she's on the way to the prison camp. Needless to say, this book is not one of those that glosses over this dreadful topic for the sake of kids' sensitivities. And that is one thing I appreciate about this book. I recently read some excerpts of an E.B. White interview in which he talks about writing for children. In it, he said, "Anyone who writes down to children is simply wasting his time. You have to write up, not down. Children are demanding. They are the most attentive, curious, eager, observant, sensitive, quick, and generally congenial readers on earth. They accept, almost without question, anything you present them with, as long as it is presented honestly, fearlessly, and clearly." Lois Sepahban seems to follow this line of thinking. There are some beacons of light (Manami's sweet and supportive best friend, her loving family, her understanding and generous teacher), but

the book doesn't look at what a shitty situation the prison camps were (the climate, the living conditions, the losses, the lack of freedom) through rose-colored glasses. It's a good (if brief) introduction to a very heavy topic for kids.

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