

A Single Shard

Linda Sue Park (1st Asian American to win the Newbery Medal)

Historical Fiction

Setting: mid-late 12th Century small Korean village

In this Newbery Medal-winning book set in 12th century Korea, Tree-ear, a 13-year-old orphan, lives under a bridge in Ch'ulp'o, a potters' village famed for delicate celadon ware. He has become fascinated with the potter's craft; he wants nothing more than to watch master potter Min at work, and he dreams of making a pot of his own someday. When Min takes Tree-ear on as his helper, Tree-ear is elated — until he finds obstacles in his path: the backbreaking labor of digging and hauling clay, Min's irascible temper, and his own ignorance. But Tree-ear is determined to prove himself — even if it means taking a long, solitary journey on foot to present Min's work in the hope of a royal commission . . . even if it means arriving at the royal court with nothing to show but a single celadon shard. (Houghton Mifflin)

Themes/Subjects:

Poverty

Friendship

Family

Import of Perseverance, Dignity, Patience, Observation, Humility, Gratitude

Pottery

Ethical Dilemmas, including intellectual property

Promises

Proverbs, Learning via Words/Story

Helpful Sites:

Author Linda Sue Park's website: <http://www.lspark.com/books/singleshard/singleshard.html>.

Includes video depicting the making of Korean Pottery and images of pottery and places mentioned in the book

Using proverbs within this book to inspire ideas for narrative writing:

http://writingfix.com/Chapter_Book_Prompts/SingleShard3.htm

Korean Celadon, Metropolitan Museum of Art:

http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cela/hd_cela.htm

Korean Celadon Ceramics, Freer Galleries, Smithsonian Institution:

<http://korean-ceramics.asia.si.edu/glaze-and-decoration/29?perpage=all>

Longevity symbols in Korean Art (Including the crane and mushroom), Philadelphia Museum of Art, <http://www.philamuseum.org/exhibitions/795.html?page=3>

Teacher Source Book for Korean Art and Culture, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA:

http://www.pem.org/aux/pdf/learn/asia_curriculum/korea-tsb.pdf

(If link doesn't work, copy and paste it into your browser)



Maebyeong with Flying Cranes and Clouds

Korea, 12th century

Stoneware with inlaid design under celadon glaze

G206

According to Daoist mythology, a magical mountain carried on the back of an ancient tortoise exists somewhere off the southern coast of China. The mountain is inhabited by immortal beings, and white cranes nest in ancient pine trees, which grow in great profusion. Thus, the crane became a symbol of immortality and a favorite theme among artists in China, Korea, and Japan. Potters of the Goryeo dynasty frequently inlaid their wares with cranes flying amid clouds. This plum vessel is notable for its great restraint and subtlety; just a few tiny cranes and minimal clouds create a spare, but lovely decoration. A cupped mouth, expanding shoulders and tapering body are characteristic elements of the maebyeong (plum vessel).

Connection:

This vase, made in Korea in the 12th century (the setting of A Single Shard) is a wonderful tie in to illustrate what a prunus vase, (perfectly shaped to display a plum branch) with a celadon glaze and inlaid design, looks like. To top it off, the inlaid design contains cranes (with images of the bird after whom Crane-man was named).

Quotes:

- "The gentle curves of the vase, its mysterious green color...the work of a human, the work of nature: clay from the earth, a branch from the sky. A kind of peace spread through Tree-ear, body and mind, as if while he looked at the vase and its branch, nothing could ever go wrong in the world." (P.52)
- "...the clay from the village pits contained exactly the right amount of iron to produce the gray-green color of celadon so prized by collectors."(p.12)

- (The royal emissary, describing Min's work): "Do you see this? 'Radiance of jade and clarity of water'--that is what is said about the finest celadon glaze. It is said of very few pieces...I say it of this one. And the inlay work...remarkable." (P. 138)

See also the beautiful porcelain vases, with celadon glaze, in the **Wu Family Reception Hall**. The Hall itself is great to visit when discussing Tree-Ear's visit to the Royal Emissary, and how grand the palace proper appeared to a homeless boy, who lived under a bridge. (See pp. 133-139)



Candlestand of a Crane on a Long-tailed Tortoise

18th century gilt bronze

Japan, Edo period (18th century)

G252

There is a great deal of symbolism attached to certain animals within Asian cultures.

Throughout Asia, the crane is a symbol of happiness and eternal youth. In Japan, the crane is one of the mystical or holy creatures (others include the dragon and the tortoise) and symbolizes good fortune and longevity because of its fabled life span of a thousand years.

A turtle is a symbol of endurance and persistence in many cultures.

Connections

Crane-man is a wonderfully honorable and caring man, who imparts his philosophic wisdom to Tree-ear, along with teaching the orphan to survive honorably, while living under a bridge.

Tree-ear is patient and persistent throughout the story, and when he molds a lump of clay while on his long journey (which he takes "one day at a time", as Crane-man advises), he molds it into the shape of a turtle.

Quotes:

-Tree Ear knew the story of his friend's name. "When they saw my leg at birth, it was thought I would not survive," Crane-man had said. "Then, as I went through life on one leg, it was said that I was like a crane. But besides standing on one leg, cranes are also a symbol of long life." (P. 7)

-(After Crane-man is unable to catch the flounder because of his clumsiness on one leg): "You must mean I am sorry about your leg...But I think it is a waste for either of us to spend too much time in sorrow over something we cannot change...Besides, when I leave this world, I will have two good legs and no need for such as this." And he tapped the crutch with his free hand. (P. 36)

-(After Crane-man died): "Wherever you are on your journey, Craneman," Tree-ear whispered, "I hope you are traveling on two good legs." (P. 145)

NOTE: There are *many* images of cranes throughout the museum; on scrolls, screens, etc.



Sandals woven from straw outside Teahouse.

Teahouse, 2001 (constructed). Yasuimoku Komuten Company Ltd.

G225

In the 16th century in Japan, rustic teahouses were built. Tea master, Murata Shako-pee introduced an architectural style called Sloan, literally "grass hut." Sloan teahouses were small, and constructed from humble materials. The low entryway required all participants to humble themselves as they entered the garden. Our Teahouse has sandals woven from straw outside the entryway and grass mats inside.

Connection:

Craneman had only one leg, but he had a wonderful skill that required the use of his two hands. He used rice straw to weave sandals for Tree-ear. He made mats; and one very important object that he made was the jiggeh made to transport Min's vases to the Royal Emissary.

Quotes:

-"Crane-man was busy too. When he grew weary of gathering rice, he would sit at the edge of the field plaiting handfuls of rice straw to make mats and sandals. This was a skill he had

taught himself long ago, being unable to perform more vigorous work because of his bad leg."
(p. 53)

-Crane man comforted Tree-ear, letting him know that he was fine about Tree-ear leaving him to go on a long journey: "Off you go now, to bring me some straw. You will need some extra sandals for such a journey, and who is to make them if not I?" (P. 93)

-(Crane-man took his job making a jiggeh to transport the vases very seriously): "The straw container had been completed. Sturdy, with double walls and an attached lid, it was exactly the size to take the vases and padding tightly packed...Crane-man fussed about his creation..."(p.100).

* See also, in the same gallery, the scroll hanging outside the Teahouse by Kano Gyokuraku, entitled: **Lin Hejing Searching for Plum Blossoms**. It depicts an older man, staring into the distance, as a young attendant draws up behind him carrying the branch of a plum tree. This is very similar to the passage in which Tree-ear brings Min branches of a plum tree to perfectly display his prunus vases, as they were meant to be used. (P. 68).



Baboon and Young, 1951

Pablo Picasso, Spanish, Bronze

G376

Pablo Picasso was always innovative in his approach to art, regardless of the medium in which he was working. As a sculptor, Picasso pioneered the technique of assemblage, constructing

works partly or entirely of found objects, both natural and man-made. In *Baboon and Young*, the artist used toy automobiles, a storage jar, and a car spring to create a playful image of parenthood. The two metal cars, undersides together, are the baboon's head; the round earthenware pot, with its high handles, makes up her torso and shoulders; and the curving steel spring forms her backbone and long tail. The rest of her body and the figure of her child were modeled from clay and the whole piece was cast in bronze.

Connection

The relationship between Tree-ear (whom Crane-man often calls "Monkey") and Crane-man is a warm loving relationship built on trust, security and knowledge of each other's honor and loyalty. Tree-ear's love for Crane-man is like that of a child to a parent.

Quotes:

-(When Tree-ear's parents died and he was less than two years old, the monks saw to it that he was brought to Ch'ulp'o, where it was thought he had uncle. The uncle could not be found, and the monks could not take him in, because fever raged in the monastery. Tree-ear was left with Crane-man, a homeless man, to be cared for until the monks could care for him themselves.): "And," Crane-man always said, "when a monk came to fetch you a few months later, you would not leave. You clung to my good leg like a monkey to a tree, not crying but not letting go, either! The monk went away. You stayed."(p.9)

(When Tree-ear is leaving Crane-man to go on his long journey, he is worried about the separation. He gives Crane-man a gift that he himself made out of clay, a monkey): "A gift," Tree-ear said. "To remind you of your promise to go daily to the house of Min." He did not want to say, *to remind you of me*. (P.105) Crane-man examined the gift closely. He turned it over and around and stroked its smooth finish. He started to speak, but the sound of his voice was rusty and he shook his head instead. (P.106)

(After Crane-man died): "When they pulled him from the river, he was clutching this in his hand." It was the little ceramic monkey...(p. 143)



Pulse, 2003, Wood (Kerto)

Tony Cragg

G380

This large wooden sculpture, simply named "Pulse", evokes the image of massive movements within our cardiovascular system when our pulse is going quickly and we are experiencing strong emotions.

Connections:

Tree-ear is a passionate young man, who constantly has to control his strong emotions, and appear humble, patient and subservient. Twice, there is even a reference to Tree-ear feeling his pulse in his throat.

Quotes:

-*"It was a fox! Tree-ear felt his pulse pounding in his throat. His thoughts seemed to be running a desperate race with each other...He would never see Crane-man or Ajima again."*(P.114)

-(When he realizes the fox is gone): "Tree-ear laughed out loud, and the sound of his laughter reminded him of his friend. *We are afraid of the things we do not know--just because we do not know them...*" (p.115)

-(When he told Min of his royal commission): "Tree-ear sat down, disappointed that Min was so subdued. Tree-ear's own heart was still pounding so hard that he could feel his pulse in his throat." (P.142)

-*"Tree-ear wanted to laugh, to cry, to fling his arms around the emissary and dance wildly around the room."* (P.139)

-(When Tree-ear learned that Min would not teach him to be a potter, because that was only passed on from father to son): "Tree-ear could hardly breathe on his walk home...*It's not my fault!* Tree-ear wanted to shout. He wanted to run all the way back to Min and scream the words." (p. 96)

-(When Tree-ear was worried and upset that his trip to Songdo was too far away, Crane-man taught him to control his emotion): "Your mind knows that you are going to Songdo. But you must not tell your body. It must think one hill, one valley, one day at a time. In that way, your spirit will not grow weary before you have even begun to walk." (P. 93)



Kowtowing Man, 8th century
China, T'ang dynasty
Earthenware with traces of pigment
G207

Ceramic tomb figures were especially distinguished during the T'ang dynasty. Polychrome painting was applied, raising these figures to a new level of excellence. (See also the Civil Dignitary in the same case, which provides a great visual for Emissary Kim, the royal emissary who awarded Min his commission.)

The posture of this figure is that exhibited by those lower in status to show respect and gratitude to those higher in status.

Connection:

Tree-ear needed to exhibit restraint and humility throughout the story. He found himself constantly feeling humble gratitude when given small things, things for which others might not be so grateful.

Quotes:

(When Min told Tree-ear that he would allow him to continue to work for him, but without payment): "Tree-ear found himself on the ground, collapsed in a full bow of gratitude. It was all he could do to keep himself from running all the way back to the bridge to tell Crane-man the good news." (P. 31)

(When Min's wife gave him some food): "A hot lump rose in Tree-ear's throat. He raised his head and saw in her eyes that she heard his thanks even though he could not speak the words." (P. 34)

(When allowed an audience with the royal emissary): "Tree-ear bowed low...(later, when granted the commission): he bowed all the way to the ground. He could not speak but prayed that the emissary understood his silent thanks." (pp. 136 and 139)



Studio of Gratifying Discourse, 1797

(Wood, ceramic tile stone, lacquer, tai-hu rocks)

G218

This library and its attached rock garden are from a large residence located in the West Donging Hills district of Lake Tai in the village of Tangli. A commemorative plaque in the garden wall dates the building to 1797, while an inscription on one of the ceiling beams names the library "The Studio of Gratifying Discourse." After the reception hall, the library or study was the most important room in an educated upper-class household. It was here that scholars could read, write, paint, examine antiques (and pottery!), and converse informally with friends; it offered a quiet sanctuary within an urban setting.

Connections

The royal emissary lived in the middle of a busy city in the royal palace. Emissary Kim's studio was a small room, where he wrote in calligraphy, using brush and ink stone.

Quote:

-"Emissary Kim sat at a low wooden table. He was writing rapidly on a scroll, racing across the paper, leaving behind a trail of perfectly formed characters...Kim wiped the brush carefully on the ink stone. He picked up the scroll and carried it to a shelf where it would dry." (p.135-136).

(Compare the royal premises with Tree-ear's home under the bridge, and his winter quarters in the dank vegetable pit).

(Note: In the adjacent gallery, there is a model of a wedding procession, exiting a courtyard and home with a ceramic tile roof, similar to the roof that Tree-ear observed in the royal courtyard on p. 134).



Monumental Vase, c.1925.Charles Catteau, French.
Boch Freres Keramis, LaLouviere,Belgium, Manufacturer
G262

Catteau made ceramics modern with simplified, flattened decoration based on nature, often in vivid colors. Violet, aqua, and red flowers trail from the top of this massive floor vase. The intentionally cracked surface on the glaze of this large vase is called craquelure.

Connection:

The brightly colored, gently falling flowers on this vase call to mind the "Rock of Falling Flowers" which Tree-ear visits in Puyo. It is there that Tree-ear experiences the darkest moment on his journey. Bandits accost him and shatter Min's precious vases.

Quotes:

-(Crane-man tells Tree-ear an old story surrounding a high rocky ledge in Puyo, that he insists Tree-ear must visit. It describes a king whose kingdom was being invaded by the T'ang army; the king and his attendants fled to the highest point, the ledge overlooking Puyo. When the

king's guards were overrun, the ladies in waiting and the concubines crowded around him, determined to protect him to the last. When the T'ang army charged up the hill, the women began jumping off the cliff, rather than become prisoners.). "Can you see it, my friend? The women jumping one after another from the cliff, their beautiful silk dresses billowing in the air-- pink, red, green, blue...indeed, like flowers falling". (pp. 116-117)
-"Go climb the Rock of the Falling Flowers when you reach Puyo, my friend," Crane-man had said. "But remember that leaping into death is not the only way to show true courage." (P.117)

Other Works of Art/Connections

G310- Christophe-Ferdinand Caron, Tea Service: Numerous animals appear on this set, and can be referenced for discussions around animals in the story and their symbolism: fox, monkey, crane, turtle, etc.

G260- Mayan Vase with monkeys: The playful monkeys can spark a discussion of Crane-man's nickname for Tree-ear, "Monkey", and the poignant story surrounding the clay monkey that Tree-ear made for Crane-man.

G253- Lying Dragon Plum Tree: This beautiful two screen set, made in 1983, illustrates the beauty of the plum branches, which are mentioned in the story on several occasions

G260- Figure (Chorotega artist): There is a small clay figure that calls to mind the monkey that Tree-ear made for Crane-man.

G239- Honolulu Aquarium by Yoshida Hiroshi: This colorful woodblock print, made in the early 20th century, connects well with the passage in which Tree-ear has a thought, "like fish breaking through the surface of the water"; or with the passages in which water and nature's movements are portrayed as a metaphor for life and for thoughts swirling within us.

G210-Jade Water Basin in the Form of an Open Gourd: There are many references to Tree-ear and Crane-man eating and drinking out of gourds. This basin also has bats carved onto it and the author, Linda Sue Park, compared the Asian fear of foxes to our culture's fear of bats.

G236- Somali Gourds: See above. References to gourds used for drinking vessels.

G332- Thomas Sully, George Washington: Compare Tree-ear's moral dilemma about "stealing" Potter Kang's idea for inlay work with the issue of the "moral correctness" of Sully copying Gilbert Stuart's work.

G310-Women Hunting the Fox: This tapestry, made in Flanders in the 17th century, can be used to discuss the fact that a fox appears twice in the story: once, to change the course of Crane-man's life, and once to prove to Tree-ear that he should not be frightened of things he does not know.

Note: There are numerous works with connections to various themes/references in the book; the Asian galleries are full of cranes, plum blossoms, chrysanthemums, celadon, inlay work.