



Fox Drum Bebop

Gene Oishi

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A coming-of-age story of survival traces the experience of a rebellious Japanese American boy in heartbreaking yet captivating ways.

The Japanese American experience became something to survive rather than embrace in the World War II internment camps, an ugly moment in American history. Gene Oishi's *Fox Drum Bebop* features the young Hiroshi Kono and his family as they move from Hacienda, California, to a camp in the Arizona desert and back again, after which life is not the same.

Hiroshi is rebellious from a young age, stealing food with other boys at the internment camp, drinking vodka with his high-school friends at breaks during band concerts, and befriending other outsiders—like a homeless “Okie” boy who was displaced during the Great Depression and a tough Mexican boy whose father was imprisoned for murder. He is aware of the class divide of society well before he is able to understand it, and the reverberating effects of racism are never far behind him. His beatnik-like behavior gives him edge, but his sexual innocence and love of music endear him to readers.

Scenes are occasionally viewed through the eyes of Hiroshi's family members, offering views of Japanese American life in the mid-1900s from a variety of perspectives. His mother collects bread crumbs to stock up in case the government stops supplying the internment camp with food. His older brother Sammy, confined to a wheelchair after being crippled by polio, observes the irony of the patriotism of his parents versus that of his siblings. These experiences captivate in heartbreaking ways as they reveal the struggles of race, class, duty, and disability through very human characters.

Oishi succeeds in portraying people changed by wartime, confused by immigration, and winding through the process of growing up on the border between the accepted and the ignored. *Fox Drum Bebop* contains entertainment and wisdom for a wide audience, showing how the process of surviving can change us.

AIMEE JODOIN (Spring 2015)

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