

Prairie Lotus

Linda Sue Park

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In Linda Sue Park's insightful novel *Prairie Lotus*, an Asian American girl and her father face prejudice in the 1880s Midwest.

Fourteen-year-old Hanna wants to make a friend, earn her diploma, and make dresses for her father's store. These goals might be achievable for others, but in the Dakota settlement town of LaForge, Hanna's background makes her a target of distrust and hostility. Hanna decides to meet prejudice with grace and dignity.

The book's pioneer landscape features wooden store fronts and a one-room school house, against which the socially acceptable prejudices of the white majority are considered. The cruelty that Hanna experiences, including when most of her classmates choose to leave school rather than share a classroom with her, is appalling.

Hanna's struggles to prove her worth are eye-opening. She is expected to accept the prejudice of others without complaint, and to meet every remark and action with kindness. At one point, she even offers to repair the shirt of a man who is physically assaulting her, with the hope that he will be distracted from his evil intent.

Conflicted secondary characters include Hanna's father, who loved his wife and loves Hanna, but who distrusts Native Americans; and Hanna's teacher, who is unwavering in her support of Hanna's education, but who urges her to avoid conflict, even when that means accepting abuse. They make up a compelling and realistic cast. That even those who are most willing to support Hanna harbor prejudices illustrates the uphill battle that Hanna fights. As Hanna comes to better understand herself and those around her, her goals change, but she never gives up hope.

Prairie Lotus is a thoughtful middle grade novel focused on racial struggles on the American frontier.

CATHERINE THURESON (March / April 2020)

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