A Bit of Background

Linda Sue Park was influenced by her parents who as immigrants embraced everything American. Park started writing at an early age and continued to write as an adult first as a way to earn a living but then to explore her Korean heritage.

Her first poem was published when she was only nine years old. Park continued to write and had more poems published in young readers’ magazines until after college when she began to write professionally as a public relations staffer for an oil company. After meeting her husband, Park moved to Ireland where she studied literature, taught English to college students, began a family, and continued to write professionally. As a food journalist, Park was able to combine her love of writing and an appreciation of food.

Her husband’s new job was the reason Park and her family (which now included two children) moved back to the United States. In the U.S., she continued to teach English to foreign students and decided that writing for young people would allow for the freedom of expression and perhaps more careful reading of her work. Her first novel, *Seesaw Girl*, was published in 1999.


Park continues to write a range of books, including those for the very young to sophisticated poetry to novels that deal with often tough topics. With all of her work, however, Park engages readers as she crafts books that resonate with all ages.

Behind the Books

**A Single Shard: An Exploration of Early Korea**

Park is well-known for her Newbery Medal–winning book, *A Single Shard*. Set in 12th century Korea, *A Single Shard* deals with timely themes such as homelessness and the value of work revealed through a taut plot and characters with whom readers can relate. These have become hallmarks of Park’s novels.

**Archer’s Quest: A Contemporary Introduction to Ancient Korea**

*Archer’s Quest* is a fantasy in which 12-year-old Kevin, a Korean American who lives with his parents in Dorchester, New York, meets his heritage head-on. Kevin’s perfectly normal afternoon alone after school is interrupted when Koh Chu-mong, the skillful archer and leader of ancient Korea, comes crashing—quite literally—into Kevin’s 21st century American life and home. Filled with humor and history, this fast-paced novel introduces Korean history and folklore while presenting likeable and very different characters brought together under unusual circumstances.

About the Program

Linda Sue Park will discuss her recent books and provide a look at what inspired them. Ms. Park will also talk about her diverse interests that include perfecting her craft, a desire to explore her heritage, and her passion for baseball. Ms. Park will also read from her recent novels as well as her collection of *sijo* and discuss this little-known Korean form of poetry.
Keeping Score: Baseball and War on the Homefront

In the early 1950s, a “conflict” is raging in Korea which touches nine-year old Maggie’s life in Brooklyn, New York. Margaret Olivia Fortini (aka Maggie) is a rabid baseball fan, knows all about the Brooklyn Dodgers, and learns how to keep detailed score in Keeping Score. War, friendship, baseball, and loyalty combine in this poignant, sometimes funny, and timeless historical novel.

Tap Dancing on the Roof: Poetic Explorations

In addition to novels, Park continues to write poetry. In Tap Dancing on the Roof, Park presents a traditional Korean short form called sijo. Each brief poem in this handsomely illustrated collection is surprisingly sophisticated as it glimpses the familiar but with a twist or in a new way.

Instructional Activities

Reading/Writing

- Like haiku, sijo is a brief poetic form. Sijo was written as early as the 6th century in Korea. In her book Tap Dancing on the Roof, Park explains the form: “The first line introduces the topic. The second line develops the topic further. And the third line always contains some kind of twist—humor or irony, an unexpected image, a pun, or a play on words.”
  - Read several poems in this collection. Identify one with humor, another with an unexpected image, or a pun.
  - Identify a subject or an idea and write a poem using the form of sijo. Using the same idea, write about it using another short poetic form (such as haiku or limerick).

Research/History

- Baseball has a long history in the United States. The sport did not always welcome minority players. Find out about baseball’s history, how the game has evolved, and perhaps how it reflects the attitudes of the broader society.
- At one point, New York City had three professional baseball teams. Find out when this was and why. Who were some of the most significant historical figures from these teams? What were their contributions to baseball?
- The ceasefire in Korea was declared in 1953; however, the “Korean Conflict” was not declared a war until many years later in 1998. Research the history of the Korean Conflict/War. Under what American President was the decision made to declare it a war? What were the key factors that influenced this decision?
- In Keeping Score, Maggie uses maps to follow the Korean Conflict of the 1950s. How can these maps provide insight into the country’s history? What are the geopolitical forces at work?

Resources

Internet Resources

For more information visit:

Linda Sue Park Interview from 2005-2006 season: kennedy-center.org/education/pwtv/

Teaching and using poetry: readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=391

Korean folktales resources: koreasociety.org/102_korean_studies_curriculum_materials/103_by_subject_area/118_folktales/view_category.html

History of baseball: loc.gov/topics/baseball/


Selected Books by Linda Sue Park:

Books discussed in this program:
- Archer’s Quest (Clarion, 2006)
- Keeping Score (Clarion, 2008)
- Tap Dancing on the Roof: Sijo (Poems). Illustrated by Istvan Banyai. (Clarion, 2007)

Other books by Linda Sue Park:
- Firekeeper’s Son. Illustrated by Julie Downing. (Clarion, 2004)
- Kite Fighters (Clarion, 2000)
- Project Mulberry (Clarion, 2005)
- A Single Shard — 2002 Newbery Medal (Clarion, 2001)
- When My Name Was Keoko (Clarion, 2002)
- Seesaw Girl (Clarion, 1999)