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Sample MonkeyNotes

Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.

Kira-Kira

by

Cynthia Kadohata

2004



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Laurie Lahey

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story is set in Iowa and Georgia during the 1950s and 1960s.

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Katie - Katie is the protagonist and main character of this story. She is a Japanese-American girl growing up in Georgia in the 1950s and 1960s. She lives with her parents, sister, and brother. Her sister, Lynn, is.....

Minor Characters

Lynn - Lynn is Katie's older sister and her best friend. Lynn takes care of Katie by explaining things to her and helping her make important decisions. Lynn's death is.....

Masao - Masao is Katie's father. In Georgia he works two full-time jobs to support their.....

Kiyoko - Kiyoko is Katie's mother. She is very delicate. Masao often asks the children to be quiet so they do not disturb their mother. In Georgia she works in a hatchery and.....

Sam - Samson is Katie's younger brother who is born in Georgia. Katie is protective of.....

Katsuhisa - Katsuhisa is Masao's brother. He is the complete opposite of Masao—loud, tall, and boisterous. He was given money by someone that he helped during World War II, so he has more money than.....

Fumiko - Fumiko is Katsuhisa's second wife. She is short and rounded. Katie would like to

David and Daniel - David and Daniel are Katsuhisa's twin sons. Katie and Lynn frequently go

Amber - Amber goes to school with Lynn and becomes her best friend. Katie is jealous when Amber.....

Mr. Lyndon - Mr. Lyndon owns the hatchery in which Masao works. Masao smashes Mr. Lyndon's.....

Silly - Silly becomes Katie's best friend. They meet in the parking lot of the hatchery where

Hank Garvin - Hank Garvin takes Sam to the hospital when he gets caught in the trap on.....

CONFLICT

Conflict - The conflict of a plot is the major problem experienced by the protagonist. In *Kira-Kira*, Katie must define her identity and figure out what it means to be a Japanese-American female in a.....

Protagonist - The protagonist of a story is the main character who traditionally undergoes some sort of change. He or she must usually overcome some opposing force. In this story, Katie must battle....

Antagonist - The antagonist of a story is the force that provides an obstacle for the protagonist. The antagonist does not always have to be a single character or even a character at all. In this plot the force that Katie must overcome is society. In Katie's society—Georgia in the

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax of *Kira-Kira* is Lynn's death. When Lynn dies, Katie has no one to tell her how to.....

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Outcome - The outcome, resolution, or denouement of this plot is that Katie realizes the importance believing there is magic in the world, despite the sad and unfair things that.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

In the opening chapter Katie tells us how her sister, Lynn, taught her the first word she ever spoke: “kira-kira.” The word means “glittering” in Japanese and Katie loved it.

Katie was born in Iowa in 1951 and knows a lot about her past because Lynn kept a diary. One of Katie’s first memories is of how Lynn saved her from a dog. Although, Lynn remembered the incident differently—she thought Katie saved her.

Katie thinks Lynn was the bravest girl in the world, as well as a genius. Lynn tells Katie that she will teach her everything she needs to know. One day Lynn shows Katie an envelope of money that their parents have been saving. Lynn says their parents are going to buy a house. Their parents own an Oriental foods grocery store. However, the business is not doing well so the family is going to move to Georgia. In Georgia Katie’s father can work in a poultry hatchery where his brother has found him a job.

Uncle Katsuhisa comes to Iowa to help Katie’s family make the move to Georgia. Uncle Katsuhisa is very different from Katie’s father. He is loud and he does not read the newspaper.

The day before the move, Katie’s parents pack and load the truck. Uncle Katsuhisa challenges Lynn to a chess game, boasting that he is the best chess-player he knows. Lynn beats him three times and Uncle Katsuhisa gets mad.

Katie says that her family was poor, but they never borrowed money and they always had food. Katie notes that her mother is very delicate and her father is always telling her and Lynn to be quiet

THEMES

Major Theme

Kira-Kira - Kira-Kira, the title of the story, means “glittering” in Japanese. This is Katie’s first word, taught to her by Lynn. The major theme of this story is that if we choose to see the world as “kira-kira,” or as.....

Additional themes are discussed in the complete MonkeyNotes study guide.

MOOD

Somber/ Inspirational - The mood of this novel is frequently somber because it treats a series of serious issues including racial discrimination and death. However, Kadohata punctuates these.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Cynthia Kadohata is Japanese-American and was born in Chicago, Illinois on July 2, 1956. Her family, which included a brother and a sister, moved around a lot when she was young. Her father was a private in the Army. They lived in Arkansas, Georgia (where her father found a job on a chicken farm as a chicken sexer), Michigan, and finally Arkansas, before finally settling in Los Angeles. Her parents divorced when.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

This story takes place in the 1950s and 1960s, predominantly in the South. While racism existed in the North (including Iowa, where Katie is from), racism was very different in the South during this time. Southern states

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had a clear system of dealing with racial differences called Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws were.....

GENRE

Young-Adult Fiction

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES

CHAPTER 1

Summary

In the opening chapter Katie tells us how her sister, Lynn, taught her the first word she ever spoke: “kira-kira.” The word means “glittering” in Japanese and Katie loved it.

Katie was born in Iowa in 1951 and knows a lot about her past because Lynn kept a diary. One of Katie’s first memories is of how Lynn saved her from a dog. Although, Lynn remembered the incident differently—she thought Katie saved her.

Katie thinks Lynn was the bravest girl in the world, as well as a genius. Lynn tells Katie that she will teach her everything she needs to know. One day Lynn shows Katie an envelope of money that their parents have been saving. Lynn says their parents are going to buy a house. Their parents own an Oriental foods grocery store. However, the business is not doing well so the family is going to move to Georgia. In Georgia Katie’s father can work in a poultry hatchery where his brother has found him a job.

Uncle Katsuhisa comes to Iowa to help Katie’s family make the move to Georgia. Uncle Katsuhisa is very different from Katie’s father. He is loud and he does not read the newspaper.

Notes

This chapter is the story’s exposition. The exposition is the section of a novel in which the main characters and main conflict are introduced. Any relevant background information is also given in this section. Here we learn that the protagonist, Katie, is Japanese-American girl who lives in Iowa with her parents and older sister. We learn that the family has to move to Georgia because her parents’ business is not doing well. We learn that Katie looks up to Lynn.

The reader should consider the time period in which this story is set and what Katie’s move might mean. During the mid-1950s there was a lot of tension between different races in the United States, particularly in the South. Because Katie is moving from Iowa to Georgia, it is likely that people will treat her differently in her new town.

CHAPTER 2

Summary

The day before the move, Katie’s parents pack and load the truck. Uncle Katsuhisa challenges Lynn to a chess game, boasting that he is the best chess-player he knows. Lynn beats him three times and Uncle Katsuhisa gets mad.

Katie says that her family was poor, but they never borrowed money and they always had food. Katie notes that her mother is very delicate and her father is always telling her and Lynn to be quiet around their mother. Katie knows her father loves her mother very much.

The next morning Katie and Lynn are hysterical because Katie cannot find her stuffed animal, Bera-Bera, and Lynn cannot find her favorite sweater. Katie and Lynn continue to cry in the truck with their uncle as their parents ride in another car. Uncle Katsuhisa calms the girls by teaching them to spit. When Katie starts crying

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again, Uncle sings songs and places her name in them. When he is done with Katie songs, Uncle sings Linnie songs.

Notes

This chapter develops Uncle Katsuhisa's character. In the beginning of the chapter, we see more of how Uncle is a "strange bird." He spits a lot and gets angry when a little girl beats him at chess. However, during the ride to Georgia, Uncle shows a kind side. Even though spitting is not something the girls' mother would approve of, he teaches them because he knows it will make them happy. When Katie starts crying again, he entertains her with made-up songs. Uncle seems strange to the girls, but he is also kind.....

OVERALL ANALYSES CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Katie - Katie is the protagonist and main character of this story. She is a Japanese-American girl growing up in Georgia in the 1950s and 1960s. She lives with her parents, sister, and brother. Her sister, Lynn, is her best friend.

Because Katie is the plot's protagonist, she must overcome a problem, which is the.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Exposition - The exposition is the section of a novel in which the main characters and main conflict are introduced. Any relevant background information is also given in this section. The exposition of this novel occurs in Chapter One where we learn that the protagonist, Katie, is

Rising Action - Rising action is the action that will lead to the climax (or the major turning point in the plot). In this novel the rising action is everything that happens

Climax - The climax of a plot is the major turning point that allows the protagonist to resolve the conflict. The climax of Kira-Kira is Lynn's death. When Lynn dies, Katie has no one to tell

Outcome - The outcome, resolution, or denouement of this plot is that Katie realizes the importance believing there is magic in the world, despite the sad and unfair things that

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Kira-Kira - Kira-Kira, the title of the story, means "glittering" in Japanese. This is Katie's first word, taught to her by Lynn. The major theme of this story is that if we choose to see the world as "kira-kira," or as a glittering place filled with magic, we can overcome even the most oppressive hardships.

The story begins and ends with this phrase-- it seems that in finding it throughout is how Katie survives and becomes a "big girl." Lynn is the one that teaches Katie this word, and she is also the one that teaches her to find magic in her world. Although Katie and her siblings live in a racist society,

POINT OF VIEW

First-person, limited. The narrator of this story is Lily. We have access to her thoughts, but not to the thoughts of the other characters

QUOTES - IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS

Edition: Atheneum, 2004

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1.) “Indians stay in the back rooms.” — Woman in the hotel office, p.27.

This quotation is important because it is the first time Katie experiences racism. While racism existed in the North (including Iowa, where Katie is from), racism was very different in the South during the 1950s. Southern states had a clear system of dealing with racial differences called Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws were directed towards African-Americans, who were called “colored.” African-Americans had to eat in different sections of restaurants and often, they were not even allowed to eat in the same restaurants as white people. African-Americans had to drink out of different water fountains, go to different schools, sit in the back of buses, and even enter many buildings through different entrances.

This system is confusing for Katie and her family because they have never seen it before, but also because they are not sure about what category they fit into. When Katie and her father meet the woman at the hotel, it is clear that the woman does not know what category they fit into either. When she calls them Indian and Mexico she shows that she does not really see a difference between any minority groups. To her they are not white, so they do not deserve to be treated kindly.

9 other quotations and analysis are included in the complete MonkeyNotes summary.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Bera-Bera - Bera-Bera is Katie’s stuffed toy. In the beginning of the story Katie cannot live without Bera-Bera and cries until he is found. However, when Sam is born Katie transitions out of babyhood and loses Bera-Bera without even noticing. Katie’s loss of Bera-Bera symbolizes this transition. She begins to move beyond the protection of her family and experience a bit of the harsh world. When Sam is.....

Other symbols and motifs are discussed in the complete MonkeyNotes study guide.

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Kira-Kira*

Author: Cynthia Kadohata

Date Published: 2004

Setting: Iowa and Georgia, 1950s/1960s

Genre: Young-Adult Fiction

Tense: Past

Meaning of the Title: “Kira-kira” is the first word that Katie learns. Lynn taught her and it means “glittering.” This phrase begins and ends the book. It is significant because it is

VOCABULARY LIST

Fatigue - physical or mental weariness

Furtively - acting with a hidden motive.....

STUDY QUESTIONS / MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. What is Katie’s first word?

A. Lynn

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- B. Kira-kira
- C. Da-da
- 2. What business did Katie's parents own in Iowa?
 - A. A grocery store
 - B. A dry-cleaners
 - C. A restaurant.....

ANSWER KEY

1. b 2. a

ESSAY QUESTIONS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- 1. Write an essay about moving to Georgia from Katie's father's perspective. Is he nervous about moving and starting a new job? Is he happy to live closer to his brother?
- 2. How do you think Katie felt on the first day of school? What would you do if Katie were in your class and someone made fun of her dress?.....

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