



The Traitor

Laurence Yep

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In the Wyoming territory in 1885, life is tough, especially for Michael Purdy. An outcast in the small town of Rock Springs, he's either bullied and bloodied, or ignored. Michael feels he might as well be a ghost in this rough coal-mining town.

But life is even harder for Joseph Young, a Chinese American boy and Michael's secret ally. Despised by the white miners, the Chinese work in dangerous conditions, struggling against poverty and racism. Still, Joseph yearns to be a "real American" -- a dream his father and the other Chinese laborers can't understand.

When the town's growing resentment toward the Chinese explodes, Michael and Joseph must test their unlikely friendship and trust each other with their lives.

The Traitor Details

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Shauna says

I really enjoyed reading this book. Since I live in Rock Springs, Wyoming, I was able to relate to the descriptions, the setting and landmarks, and the history.

Sue says

This details the friendship between an outcast American boy and an outcast Chinese boy in the coal mining town of Rock Springs, Wyoming. Their friendship is tender as they learn the things they have in common and yet the things that divide them. Then the town erupts in bloodshed as the author tells of the factual Chinese massacre that occurred there and how the townspeople react. Very interesting story.

Heather says

So far, I enjoy this book. My knowledge of the history of Chinese immigrants is rather limited and this book is (sadly) giving me plenty of info. Such a sad, sad history-- so much misunderstanding and bigotry. But unless we learn our history, we will be doomed to repeat it. I do love learning about history through these kinds of fictional books, as it brings things to life and causes me to empathize with the different people represented in the story.
I'll add more later when I complete the book.

Yi-Ann says

I didn't like this book that much, but for the most part I think Laurence Yep does a pretty good job of portraying how badly Chinese people were treated. a lot of people think that it was worse for the africans, but really, it was just about the same or worse. the workers were pretty much slaves. shelter was provided for them (but not food) for extremely low or no pay. and not just in the south. the first reaction people had when africans were legally and officially set free, chinese people were shipped over to the south.OY!

Diane Dunham says

Always a lesson in a Laurence Yep book. This book is based upon the worst race riot in America's history. Two teenage boys from different races become friends. Read this book and see what happens.

Sarah Crawford says

This is an excellent but quite upsetting book about an actual event that took place in 1885 in Wyoming, the massacre of a bunch of Chinese immigrants by white men.

The fiction part concerns two boys, Michael Purdy and Joseph Young. Joseph is of oriental ancestry, but was born in the US. Michael is white, but his mother and father never married, technically making him a bastard, and as such he's considered an outcast by the rest of the townspeople. Joseph is hated by most of the whites because he is Chinese, and therein lies the basis of the entire story, the incredible hatred for the Chinese that the whites had at the time.

The Chinese were involved in working on mines (in this area; in other places they were working on the railroads), and they became targets of hatred with many of the themes being used that we hear today against other immigrants, that they are "stealing our jobs" being the main attack used. In this case, though, the attacks go far beyond the verbal, all the way to murder.

Michael and Joseph end up becoming friends, and how that happens is well written. Also well written is the lives of those around Michael and Joseph, where the characters become quite real and the events draw the reader in.

Below are some newspaper articles about the actual event. The first one is from the Yates Country Chronicle (NY), Sept. 9, 1885. The next one is from The Morning Review, (Ill). October 7, 1885, and the last one is from The Athens Messenger of March 11, 1886, all three articles showing that the events depicted in this story really happened.

It's a story of racial hatred, something which the US has always seemed to have a great deal of. The anti-Oriental feelings led to various laws limiting and stopping immigration. Persons of Japanese ancestry, even those born in the US, and that were living on the West Coast were rounded up in World War II and put into internment camps, with no charges and no trials being used. For a long time in relatively recent times that hatred was directed against persons of Hispanic origin, although now persons of Middle Eastern/Arab origin have become the targets of racial hatred.

Books like this one are very important for young readers, because if we can get young people to realize the viciousness and uselessness of racial hatred then, perhaps, they will grow up into adults that lack those types of feelings. This is definitely a good book, although some of the massacre scenes might be a little graphic for some readers.

Victoria says

This is what historical fiction should be. Engaging characters, descriptive and accurate portrayal of racial tensions without being preachy/feeling like you're being pushed an agenda. The two main characters demonstrate the importance of treating everyone like human beings and repairing family relationships. The parents seem real without being ultimately written off as "wrong," if you know what I mean.

May not be suitable for elementary-age age because of some violence (and also because of having to explain what a bastard is.)

Alison says

The Traitor I definitely didn't feel like reading about a race riot tonight, so I ended up skimming the last 100 pages. It gets intense from what I could see.

There are so many men in these books, and they're getting bleaker as they go on. There are also so many matter-of-fact descriptions of death/murder in the stories so far and it feels really weird.

It seems like it's been ages since I was reading about Cassia in *The Serpent's Children* and like it will be ages before I finally reach Casey in *The Child of the Owl*.

Rose says

JF Yep

Adele S. says

Well, this isn't the sort of book that I typically would read, but we had to read a historical fiction book for my history class and I chose this one.

First thing's first- I have never read any other book in the *Golden Mountain Chronicles*, but you really don't need to. It stands alone, which I appreciated.

This book is about a terrible time in American history: the race riots. Chinese came over to the western part of America. People liked hiring them because they would work for cheap. However, white people living in the west felt as though the Chinese were taking their jobs. Resentment grew until the race riots happened.

This book is narrated by two different 12-year old boys, one of them white and one of them Chinese.

Joseph doesn't fit in with the other Chinese workers in the mine where he and his father work. His father had tried to stop some laws against the Chinese becoming citizens from being passed but it failed, making Joseph and his father outcasts. Joseph is even more ostracized because he wishes to be a true American, which the Chinese can't understand- they just want to return to China.

Michael also has issues fitting in. He has no friends because he was born to parents that weren't married. They never were. All the other boys his age in town treat him like crap and beat him up all the time.

So when the two meet, they find friends in each other. As the book progresses, you see the resentment among the white townsfolk and even the Chinese grow and grow until it reaches the bursting point. The race riot a disgusting and disturbing scene, but I believe that it was a very accurate description of the real race riots. There was one part that was particularly disturbing... (view spoiler)

The writing style wasn't fantastic, and there were several times where I became bored while reading, but it is a rather good book that tells us about a time in American history that most people don't know about.

