

>> Hello, everyone. I'm Miss Jenny from the Parkchester Library, and today, we are going to be talking to the fabulous Linda Sue Park. Let's give a warm welcome to her. She's the author of many books for young readers, including the Newbery Medal winner "A Single Shard," and The New York Times bestseller, "A Long Walk to Water." Her most recent title is "The One Thing You'd Save," which comes out on March 16, 2021. Today, we're going to be talking about "Prairie Lotus," a historical fiction middle-grade novel. When she's not writing, speaking, teaching, or care-giving for her two grandchildren, she spends most of her time on equity and inclusion work for We Need Diverse Books, and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. She's also on the advisory board for The Rabbit Hole, National Children's Literature Museum Project. So let's get started with the presentation.

>> Okay, hi, everyone. I am so delighted to be here today. I really appreciate the invitation from New York Public Library, because I love libraries. I grew up a library kid. I still go to the library -- well, less often in the last year, right, because it's been such a strange year. But when I'm able to, I still go to the library -- oh, I don't know -- at least a couple times a month. It is one of my favorite places, and I always love talking to librarians, and talking at library events. All right, so today, I'm going to talk about "Prairie Lotus," which is my latest historical fiction novel, and the main character is a girl named Hanna who lives in what the United States government called Dakota Territory in the 1880s, so a very long time ago. Dakota Territory was and is actually Oceti Sakowin homeland. It is the homeland of the indigenous people that a lot of Americans know more familiarly as the Sioux tribe, okay? But their name for themselves is Oceti Sakowin, so that is where the novel takes place. And I am going to now hopefully share my screen, and show you a few slides about the book. Okay, great. So here, you can see Hanna on the cover of the book, and one of the questions that authors get asked the most often -- in fact, I don't think I've ever done a single presentation, and I've done thousands of them, where someone has to say to me, "Where do you get your ideas?" Or, "Where did you get the idea for your book?" Or, "What inspired you to write that book?" And I don't mind answering the question over and over, because it's an important one, you know, the process of how a book came to be. So for this book, what I kept thinking about was a concept that has become known as the single story. Now, this was -- this phrase, "the single story," was made most famous by an adult author whose name is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and she did a famous TED talk a few years ago called "The danger of the single story." And a single story is kind of a slippery or difficult concept, even for some adults to get their minds around, so I want to talk about it a little bit today, to help you out understanding it. Because my experience is that kids totally get it, all right? All right, so here's a couple of examples of the way the single story works, and why it's dangerous. I want you to take just a moment and picture in your head a cowboy. What does a cowboy look like? Okay, now I want you to picture a group of cowboys, maybe five. Okay, now a bigger group, 10 cowboys. Ten -- 20 cowboys. Okay, 20 cowboys hanging out by the corral, maybe some of them on horses, and all that kind of stuff. Everybody got a picture of cowboys in your head? Okay, good. Did any of your cowboys look like this? These are African-American cowboys. Between about 1830 and 1930, sort of the big heyday of cowboys in the United States, four out of every 10 cowboys were black, four out of

10, okay? Not one out of 100, not one out of 1000, four out of 10. If you pictured a group of 20 cowboys, almost half of them should've been black, but that's not the story that we've been given from our history lessons, from popular culture, from Hollywood movies, and all kinds of media, right? We, almost all of us, and I bet the same is true for most of your teachers, and any adults listening to this. We kind of have a single story about what a cowboy looks like, and that single story, when you have a single story that so many people think is true, if you don't have the complete story, the whole story, the single story is actually a lie. It's so incomplete that it's not true. Now, here's another way the single story works that probably everybody has experienced. You get into some kind of argument with a sibling, with a friend, okay, and you're arguing about it. And maybe an adult has to step in to kind of be the mediator, and the other person -- just say it's your sibling -- gets to go first. Hey, she or he did blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and tells their side of the story. Now, they might not even lie, but they've left things out. They haven't accounted for how you felt. They only got to -- they got to tell only their side of the story, and the adult says, "Okay, here's my decision. You're punished." But -- but wait. I didn't get to tell my side of the story. The adult heard only a single story, and even if your sibling didn't lie, it wasn't a complete story. You end up getting punished for it. That's dangerous for you, right, or at least, at the very least, it's unfair or unjust, okay? Now, when single stories happen to whole communities of people, there can be real danger, and I mean literally life and death danger, right? So what I wanted to do -- that's a very long way of explaining that I wanted to do with "Prairie Lotus" was to try to start, in a small, small way, in just a one-book, one-character, one-author way, to dismantle the single story. In pioneer times, were there people of other races than white? Oh, there most certainly were, but if we picture pioneers, we picture covered wagons, and log cabins, and, you know, people traveling to distance places to try to find new homes. And because of a single story that has been perpetrated in our culture, we think of them always, almost always, as white, okay? So Hanna's not white. Her father is white, but her mother is Asian. So her story serves to, I hope, start to dismantle that single story that all of us have from this particular part of American history. Okay. Hanna goes to school in a one-room schoolhouse that looks like this. This is the exterior of a one-room schoolhouse in Dakota Territory, or what is now South Dakota, okay? This interior is not from the same building, because I could not find a good interior. It was very dark inside this building, all right? So I've got an interior from a different building, but you can see that this would've been a classroom for grades K-12, okay? There would've been one, or at most two students in each grade, right? There was a stove in the middle of the room to warm it. Usually, girls sat on one side of the room, and boys sat on the other. In this photo, you can see a water bucket with a dipper, okay, and most of the schoolhouses had this for the kids to go out and fill from the water barrel or the spring, and then bring it back inside to get a drink when they were thirsty. And there is an exact water dipper and water bucket in "Prairie Lotus." So when you -- if and when you read that part of the book, it has a small part to play in the plot. So when you read it, you can picture what it looked like. Okay, so, Hanna wants to go to school and graduate, and then she wants to help her dad in their dress goods shop. This is a dress goods shop, or a fabric shop, from the same time as Hanna's story. However, once again, I couldn't find a good picture for

the exact time and place. This is exactly a dress goods shop in New York City. So it's bigger and fancier than Hanna's father's shop would've been, but it's laid out in a very similar way. There would've been shelves on the walls for these bolts of fabric. There would've been pattern books for ladies to look through and order the patterns that they wanted, okay? So even though this is much larger and fancier than Hanna's father's shop, it would've been similar to this. Now, at one point, Hanna gets very stressed out, because she has to make a dress in three days, okay? So I don't know if any of you are sewers. I learned how to sew when I was young, but the sewing in the book is based on my mom and my grandmother, who are both really good seamstresses. And you might be thinking to yourself, okay, three days to make a dress -- probably, you'd have to work pretty hard, but you get it done. You could get a dress done in three days. Please remember, however, that Hanna did not have a sewing machine. Sewing machines had been invented, but they were very expensive. Hanna dreams of having a sewing machine someday, but right now, she is going to do every stitch by hand. And the dress that she needs to make does not look like the dresses we wear today. In three days, by hand, without a sewing machine, she would've been trying to make a dress that looked like one of these. Okay? I mean, I don't even know how you sat down in this one, but look at how fancy these were. At one point, she thinks, "I'm not going to do that many ruffles. I'm going to do fewer ruffles, because it'll take less time." But buttons, and bows, and trains, and drapes, and all this decoration -- she spends a lot of time thinking about the buttons for the dress, because you can see from this one what an important feature they were. So that is the kind of dress that Hanna was trying to make by hand in three days. Okay. There were fashion magazines in those days, just like there are today. The most famous was called the "Godey's Lady's Book." If you wanted to be at the height of fashion and totally trendy and really hot, you looked through "Godey's Magazine" at pictures like this, and this is a page from "Godey's Lady's Book" in 1880, okay, right at the time that Hanna was sewing her dress. Okay. The book is called "Prairie Lotus," and Hanna sews a tiny lotus onto everything she makes. It's sort of like her Nike swoosh. It was actually her mother who invented it, okay? Now, a lotus sounds like a fancy, exotic flower, and it is associated with Asia, but we just call them a different name here. We call them water lilies. So many of you have probably seen water lilies in your life, and a certain kind of water lily in Asia is called a lotus, okay? So Hanna's mom invented this simple little embroidered flower, which she put on all the garments she made, and Hanna puts now on all the garments that she makes, sort of in tribute to her mother. And that's why the book is called "Prairie Lotus." Also, as you can see, lotuses need a lot of water. They grow in water. They grow in ponds, right? The prairie is a very dry place, okay? Not many lotuses grow on the prairie, because you need a lot of water, and prairie is somewhere where not much rainfall falls. So the title "Prairie Lotus" and Hanna's using this lotus in her embroidery is also kind of symbolic in a way that, according to the single story, Hanna is out of place on the prairie, okay, according to sort of the way of majority thinking, and the way our culture has taught us. Oh, were there Asian people back then in the United States? Yes, there were, as there were many other kinds of people, right? Okay. So what I'm going to do now is show you a few slides of when I present this book to teachers, and I asked them to think about how they teach the single story -- how they teach this phase of history in

their classrooms, which is usually as a single story. A single story is way easier to teach. I get that, right? It is much harder to teach the complexities of a more complete story, okay? And that's why history textbooks lean so hard on single stories. So it is really up to caring teachers and librarians to provide a variety of lenses for their students, to help their students toward a greater truth, toward a more complete truth, okay? So if you think about the way lessons from American history are presented in textbooks, we have phases of history often, right, and you get, you know, this one discovery and exploration in third grade, maybe, or fourth, and it goes on down. And, you know, these are the terms that are often used, okay? And these are fairly common single story terms. Educating our kids on the honest truth of our country's past is the key to its successful future, because the single story method of teaching history leads directly to the social problems and the social injustice that our country faces today. Okay, I am going to -- oh, sorry, I have one -- here are some titles that cover the same period as Hanna's story, and one thing I often ask myself when I'm trying to dismantle the single story is, who else was there? Who was the other sibling who didn't get to tell their side of the story? Who were the other people not in the movie, okay? And here are some titles that give you really great stories about other people who were there in the history of the American west. I also have an educator guide on my website, and that gives you still more titles for the same period. Okay. So I am going to exit screen sharing now and come back to you all.

>> Beverly [assumed spelling] asks, who decided on the cover design with the family that's hidden in the character? It's gorgeous.

>> Oh, yes, thank you. So I hope you can see it. You can see that Hanna is translucent, and inside her shirt, you can see tiny fingers, and that's her family walking. And this is a sort of motif that Dion Mbiti [assumed spelling] is famous for, the illustrator, okay? That's one of his things. Now, I don't -- as far as I know, and I'd actually have to ask the artisan this -- he wasn't asked to do that for the thing. So it was his decision, right? But my goodness, I was so thrilled. It was just -- you know, you don't see it at first, and it's okay if you don't see it at first. But after you look, it's just really -- I think really meaningful. And he's also got the -- sorry. He's also got the lotus flowers in there you can see, as well as the family. He's got the lotus flowers at the bottom that are another part of her story. So I am not a good illustrator myself, so I am always in awe of what my illustrators and cover artists do.

>> "Prairie Lotus" was very well-researched. Can you share a bit about your motivation and about your research process? And we had a question from the audience, from Anthony [assumed spelling], asking what inspired you to visit the era in which "Prairie Lotus" is set.

>> Part of it -- part my inspiration was the "Little House" books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, which I had loved as a child, and then learned were very problematic once I became an adult. And so, this was difficult. You know, the things you love as a child are very deep loves, right? They're hard to get rid of, but I -- and some people seem to be able to just say, "Okay, those books are racist, and I'm done with them." And that was

harder for me, because the very first writing I ever did was sort of Wilder fanfiction. I have no doubt that I became a writer because of those books -- not just because of those books. There were other books as well. So it was harder for me to sort of excise them from my mental consciousness, and "Prairie Lotus" was an attempt to do that, was an attempt to sort of reconcile my childhood love of those books with the adult knowledge of how painful and problematic they are. So that was kind of the impetus, and I made three research trips. I had three Native American sensitivity readers, and probably six or eight more consultants. I had, you know, Asian-American scholars, and research sources for -- and one thing that I had to figure out -- and this came from way back in my childhood, when I was writing Wilder fanfiction. I used to write myself into the story, and I had found out -- I knew that the time of this story, there were no Koreans in the United States. They went as far as Hawaii, and then they didn't get to the United States again until the 1900s. So in order to set my story in the Midwest where I had grown up, where I was familiar with it, and also where the Wilder books were set, the character couldn't be Korean. She had to be Chinese. Well, I have spent my entire career trying to get young people to understand that Korean and Chinese are not the same, right? And here I was, about to mix them up again, and I was like, oy, this is awful [laughter]. So Hanna has a Korean grandparent, which would've been possible, of course, because her grandparents were from China, and there was a lot of interchange between Chinese and Korea -- and -- China and Korea in many different ways over centuries, right? So that's how I sort of got the Korean-ness in there, just to try to, once again, be sure that at least for me, you know, it was -- they're separate things. And there were many reasons that I wanted Hanna to be traveling with only one parent, with only her father, okay? And -- but, plot-wise, not having mama alive in the story also helped me de-emphasize Chinese culture. Does that sound terrible? That sounds terrible. I don't mean that. I just meant that it wouldn't be as an active part of Hanna's life, since that parent was gone, so -- and had been gone for some years by the time the story takes place. Because, you know, that was important to me. I'm not an expert on Chinese culture. I'm just -- I barely know some things about Korean culture, because I'm Korean-American, not Korean, right? So all of those nuances go into play, and there's sometimes a tremendous headache. But it's also great that we're now talking and thinking about these things, which didn't happen for so long. I don't even know if I answered the question. Did I answer the question?

>> I think you answered it.

>> Okay.

>> So Joe asks, "How do you research the everyday life of a time period? While there might be a good amount of information on what Hanna's life may have looked like in 'Prairie Lotus,' in thinking back to 'A Single Shard,' information on royalty and the lifestyle of the rich might be easy to find, but how much is available on average people?"

>> Oh, absolutely. That's a huge difficulty, actually, and it's compounded by the fact that I don't read Korean, right? So there -- and history there. Thousands and thousands

of Korean archives were burned by the Japanese during their occupation, so even if I did read Korean, there's huge holes in the archives in Korea, because so many precious documents were gotten rid of. I rely on my parents and other members of my family who can read Korean, but for "A Single Shard," what happened was, it was very difficult to find, just as the questioner asked -- it was very difficult to find sources on how ordinary people lived in Korea at that time. But art historians are obsessive, right, and they dig, and dig, and find all kinds of clues and information about the art of the period, and even the art process. So there's a lot of pottery in "A Single Shard," a lot of pottery-making, and pottery details, and stuff about the kiln, and stuff about the clay, because that's the stuff I could find. So there's less stuff about how Tree-ear brushed his teeth, and more stuff about how the pottery was created, because those were the sources that were available to me. And I think that's what you do. You have to work with what you've got. It is also, though, why I write historical fiction, especially in an era like that, and not nonfiction. Because, you know, I don't feel confident enough about my sources or my ability to access sources to say, "This is how it was." So in fiction, I'm able to say, "This is how I think it could've been," and then make my story that way.

>> So Robin [assumed spelling] asks, "Was the meeting of the -- and Hanna based on an actual event in your research, or was it just kind of creative liberties?"

>> The meeting with -- I'm sorry?

>> With the Native Americans.

>> Oh, yeah. Okay, right. No, not an actual event, although, you know, I've found as many -- one of the wonderful sources that I found was not an Oceti Sakowin source, but it was the oldest one I could find that had what you would call primary source information. And it was called "Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden," about a Hidatsa woman, and her farming methods, and the Hidatsa lived very nearby the Oceti Sakowin. So their territories overlapped even, and so, the things that Buffalobird-woman was doing would -- some of the things would have been similar to what Wichape-win [assumed spelling] and her companions would've done. So, you know, as much as possible that I could find in, quote unquote, "primary sources" and other documentation, which was -- you know, you take with a -- you take carefully, because it was mostly by outsiders. It was by white people, right? So -- and then, really relying heavily on my Oceti Sakowin expert readers to say, "Does this sound right? Is this how it would've been done, you know?" And so, I'm very, very grateful to them, even though the parts with the Native characters are small. You know, they just occur twice in the story, and then another time in Hanna's consciousness, but I was very concerned about trying to get those parts as correct as I possibly could.

>> We see in the story that there are times that Hanna knows in her heart that what she thinks is right, but the authority figures in her life, like her dad, don't always agree with her. Do you have advice for kids who might be going through a similar situation today?

>> Yeah, I think that for a while -- I don't know how this started, and I kind of get it. But for a while, it seemed to be a truism in children's literature that the child character had to solve the problem by themselves. And I was like, wait, what? You know, that's -- to me, that's just so much pressure on a kid, you know, and I think that a huge part of -- just say American-dominant culture, for good and for bad, is this emphasis on the individual. And that has doubtless fueled many good things throughout American history, but recently, it's very much been in evidence that there are an awful lot of advantages to emphasizing community at least as much as individuality. And I think we're seeing some of that in, for example, I have the freedom not to wear a mask, which to me is saying, "I have the freedom to put myself in front of the good of the whole rest of the country." Okay? I mean, you know, when I wear a mask, I'm not worried about protecting myself. I'm worried about protecting my elders and everyone else's families, right? So I think that that's part of the problem, to say you have to do it yourself, you have to fix it yourself, it's all up to you, right? In all of my books, every single one of them -- and I think this may partly be from an Asian background that emphasizes respect for elders, okay? That's just ground in, or woven in, or just an innate strand of Korean culture, and many other traditional cultures in the world, right? Your elders are really, really important. So for kids, you know, ask for help. You have to find adults that you trust, and if the adult in authority is not listening, try to find someone who does. And that's hard, and it can be really difficult. And it can be hard to step up, and it can be hard to talk to people about problems that you're -- may having, or injustices, or unfairnesses. But in every community, there are adults who care about you, and who will be the people who will listen, and who will be the people who will try to help. So you just have to find them, all right? There are certainly times I don't want you all to have to go to somebody else every time you have a problem. There are times when you do need to fix things yourself, okay, but there are other times that you need to ask for help. And I think that's a huge part, a huge part of growing up, of becoming an adult, of learning how to make good choices. When can I do this myself? When do I need to ask for help?

>> Awesome. I think that's such fantastic advice. So Joe asks, "Do you enjoy writing contemporary stories, or historical? How do you approach writing contemporary stories differently than you would from writing historical stories?"

>> Well, the main difference between contemporary and historical for me as a writer is that -- is the assumption of shared knowledge with my reader, right? So if I say, "The car drove by" in a contemporary novel, I probably don't have to explain what a car is, right? I have that shared knowledge with my reader, and that's a very simple example. But if I tell you about Tree-ear in "A Single Shard" living under a bridge, I might have to explain that more, or the different aspects. I can't assume that my reader shares the knowledge that I have, okay? So that makes historical fiction more of a challenge. You have to spend a little more time on those kinds of details, but you don't want to bore your reader to death with description. So whenever possible, I try to incorporate those kinds of details into the actual action or plot of the story, right? So I think that's the main difference, is that shared experience that I can count on my reader having,

and even there, we are learning that, you know, kids who grew up rural don't have the same assumptions as kids who grew up urban. Different communities, marginalizations, ethnic and all kinds of experiences -- there's not necessarily that shared experience. So I think that, with contemporary fiction, or actually any fiction, we used to assume -- adults, as well as young people -- but we used to assume that the shared experience that we're talking about was mostly probably a white, Christian, straight, middle-class experience, right? And now we're all trying to be more conscious of that that may not be the shared experience of all readers, and in fact, is the shared experience of fewer and fewer readers as this country's demographics continue to change, right? I think that's a great thing. I think it's a great thing for certainly readers to be getting a greater variety of stories, but also for writers to not make assumptions, and to have to do the work of really thinking through how to connect with the reader.

>> I love that. That's really beautiful, and that actually leads very well into our next question. You've broken a lot of barriers in the publishing world by writing books that center on Korean history and culture. What was the first book you read where you felt represented?

>> That's an interesting question, because as a young reader, as a kid, I didn't realize that I was doing this, and this is an experience that I share with many readers who come from marginalized communities. I was constantly practicing stepping into shoes that weren't mine, okay? So I was Laura in Laura Ingalls Wilder. I was Anne of Green Gables. I was all of these people that I wasn't, just by virtue of wanting to connect with them so badly, these characters that I loved so much, right? And so, then realizing that I don't -- you know -- an adult, I don't think, that, oh, my gosh, there's all these people all this time who haven't had to do that, who haven't had to make that shift in imagination, or that code-switch in your brain, because this character is like me, right? And so I don't -- I mean, if I -- and this is very, very common to many of us who grow up to become writers, is any books that represented Asian characters when I was a kid -- and I'm older than probably most of you, okay? I'm going to be 61 any minute now. So we're talking 50 years ago. Any children's books that I was reading that had Asians in them, I don't even want to remember. I mean, okay, they were just awful. They were really -- and I suppose the first time I remember seeing a book would've been something, you know, that I could embrace -- would've been something by Laurence Yep, which wasn't until I was an adult, okay? So I didn't see them as a kid at all, and of course, that whole mirror thing that Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop talks about is so important, and it continues to be important. But the window thing is maybe even more important, as far as social justice goes, okay? That ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes -- and no wonder so many people in the dominant culture aren't good at it. They didn't have to do it their whole childhoods, right? They don't have practice at it [laughter]. So we need to get our kids practicing that now, and that is going to help them, I'm convinced, solve the problems of when they get to be the adults in control and in power.



>> This is a related question, but you mentioned before kind of writing fanfiction in a way. Do you think that's a good way for kids who want to be writers themselves, a good way for them to practice, or do you have any other advice for kids who are trying writing for the first time?

>> By the way, it was not called fanfiction back then. It was just me making up stories in my head where I was Laura's best friend, right? It was totally not called fanfiction back then. Yeah, I think that any way, any avenue that gets kids into writing is a great thing. I often tell them in my presentations that there's almost no job worth having where you get paid halfway decently that you don't have to do some writing. You have to e-mail your boss. You have to write a report, you know, things like that. A badly-written e-mail can get you fired, and it happens to people every single day. So no matter what you want to do, not just talking about people who want to be writers -- no matter what job you want to have, the ability to communicate clearly in writing is a life skill. And so, anything that gets a kid writing, I think, is great, and for many -- not all, but for many of them, that may be some kind of fanfiction. I also love -- let's see. The writer Shannon Hale's son said -- one of you is going to know this term better -- but said that analyzing literary types became much easier for him when he realized -- when he thought of them as fanfiction theories, right? Which I thought was just awesome, right? So, you know, what's really going on here, or what might happen, or what's an alternative -- that these are all skills from lit crit, right? And that's what kids who are into fanfiction are actually practicing.

>> Awesome. So our next question is from Robin, and she'd like to know, "Does writing energize or exhaust you," and on the same -- on a similar topic, Michelle [assumed spelling] also asks, "What's your favorite way of finding your inspiration again after you get a writing block?"

>> Oh, well, it's apropos, because I've had a writing block since the pandemic began. There's been a lot going on in my family on top of the pandemic, so that has taken a great deal of the, I guess, whatever wellspring it is that I write from. So that's been very, very difficult, but I got my first vaccine jab. And the country's getting vaccinated, and so, that really did -- and the days are longer now, right [laughter]? And the sun stays out, and all of that is helping. And I'm starting just to twiddle a little bit, and hoping that I'll be able to get going writing soon. But what I like to say to young people is that I was about 10 or 11 years old -- reading is always my inspiration. Reading is always my main inspiration for writing, but I was about 10 or 11 years old when I was looking at a book -- so I'm not talking about a graphic novel. I'm not talking about a picture book. I'm talking about a chapter book or a novel which is all text, right? And I show -- I like to show kids a page like this and say, "What you are actually looking at is a white rectangle with row after row after row of teeny, tiny black squiggles. That's actually what you're looking at, white rectangle, black squiggles." But if you can read, you can be looking at those black squiggles, and a moment later, you can be like, that's funny. Or you can be like, oh, no, what's going to happen next? You can even be crying. This is so sad. You're not looking at pictures on a screen. You're not looking at images, or anything moving. You are looking at little

black squiggles. Okay, that is like magic. Little black squiggles are making you feel emotions and putting pictures in your head. That's magic. For a writer, it is also power. I don't know you. You live hundreds of miles away from me. I can make you cry using just black squiggles, all right? I mean, that's -- it's a pretty powerful thing for a writer to be able to do, to reach out to so many people that you don't know and make that kind of connection with them. So when people say reading is interactive, reading is magic, I really believe that's what it is. It connects people over time and space, and it makes you feel things, even though you're not even looking at pictures. Right? It's a tremendous thing. And so, that's always been my main inspiration for writing, is just that feeling of -- you know, that it's so exciting. It's like, this is going to be magic.

>> Speaking of connecting with people, your website has been getting some buzz in the children's lit world. Can you tell us a bit about it, and what that means to you?

>> Oh, right. I have started a new page called KiBooka, which stands for kid's books by Korean-Americans and Korean diaspora, so Koreans around the world, as well as Korean-Americans. And it's just a listing. It's just the author photograph and a book, and everything clicks through to their website. But as I said, when I began my career more than 20 years ago, there were a few of us, Korean-Americans, but not very many. And a website of that would've been very small [laughter], very sad. And now, there are dozens of us, and that's very, very exciting to me. I've always done a lot of equity and inclusion work in children's books, but that was general. And it's still important. It's still the most important thing that I do, but I thought to myself -- I've thought to myself for a few years now, I would really like to do something for my own Korean-American community. And this was the easiest way that I could think of to do that, because, I mean, I would love to be able to blurb everyone's books, or to review them all, or whatever, and I just can't. You know, I don't have that time, but to be able to -- people who come visit my website can see their books also. And it's actually now a separate website that you can get to from my website, and it's awesome. It's so fun for me, and I just go and look at it once in a while, because I'm like, oh, there's so many now. And as you all know, there's been a serious uptick in hate crimes against Asian-Americans, and anything that puts positive images of Asians who, for a long time, were kind of behind the scenes in American life. And that became a danger, that we weren't thought of as being American. So anything that gets, I think Asians out there in front of as many eyes as possible, to say, "You know, yes, we are. We are here, and we are Americans," is a good thing.

>> You also serve as an advisory board of We Need Diverse Books. Can you tell us just a little bit about that organization for any of our viewers who maybe haven't heard of it?

>> Okay, well, it's a tremendous organization, which began in 2014, and by Ellen Oh and several of her colleagues. Once in a while, it is mistakenly reported in the internet that I was a founder. I was not. I don't have that kind of brain. Those people are geniuses. I joined very shortly after it was founded, but I was not one of the founding members. And I'm very proud of my role on We Need Diverse Books, which

has many different aspects that try to promote diversity in children's books. So there are awards for writers. There's a wonderful classroom program to get books into the hands of kids, and the one that I wanted to work on, the aspect that I wanted to work on right from the start, which I said to them, "Yes, I will join you, if you let me do this," is internships in children's publishing. Because children's publishing is a very, very white field, and then, of course, it's no surprise. It's sort of, like, not their fault. That whole community is publishing what speaks to them, and therefore, that was limited to mostly white books, right? So we have had more than 50 interns throughout the duration of the program, and something like 65 or 70% of them now have full-time, permanent jobs in children's publishing. I can't wait until that number is 300, and 500, and 1000, but for now, some of them have become acquiring editors. So they are buying books from people of marginalized communities, and it's a tiny, tiny, slow start, but it's a start. And it's -- I consider it, you know, really important work, and I'm really proud of the work that We Need Diverse Books is doing there.

>> Are there any middle-grade novels besides your own that you're looking forward to reading this year?

>> Oh, golly. Yeah [laughter], probably too many to list. But I do try to keep up -- librarians are my friends. I have a wonderful local librarian whose name is Dena Viviani [assumed spelling]. She's the young adult librarian at Brighton Memorial Public Library outside Rochester, New York. And she's my go-to gal. I go in there. Dena, what am I reading? And she'll pull a pile of books off the shelf, and I look at the reviews. And I look at, you know, word of mouth, and things like that. So I have on my bio that I know very well I will never be able to read every great book ever written, but that does not stop me from trying.

>> Well, one last question for you. We're super-excited about your new book, "The One Thing You Save." Can you tell us a bit about it, and if there are any other new projects that you're working on?

>> Sure. Well, "The One Thing You'd Save" -- where did it go? Oh, right, it's right. Sorry. It's a middle-grade collection of linked poems, and a lot of people are familiar with the sort of -- I don't know what you'd call it -- parlor game, where if there was a fire in your house, what's the one thing you would grab as you ran out the door, right? So that's a common question, and people often think that's how this book started. But that was, like, step two. Step one was, when I am working on a character for any of my books, of course, I think about what they look like, and what they sound like, what they say, what they do. But I also think about their stuff. I think about what is important to them. I think about things like if you walked into this character's bedroom without them there, what would you be able to tell about them? And you can do that with a lot of people, right? You can walk into people's homes, or their rooms, and you can say, "Oh, this person likes X, or Y, or is sloppy, or is obsessively tidy," or whatever, right? You can -- people's stuff tells us a lot about them. So then I'm like, how do I write a book about people's stuff? How do I write a book about that? And then, the "if there was a fire" question occurred to me, right? That would be a

way to do it. So originally, it was going to be a classroom of kids, one poem, one kid talking about their thing, their one thing. But as I began writing it, it turned into a class discussion, because they discussed with each other, and argued, you know. You'd take that? Really? Well, that's not what I'd take. I'd take this. And so, the poems -- you know, some of them seem separate from the others, but many of them link up to -- and have later references throughout the book. So it -- because it's a syllabic form, based on the Korean of Sijo, you might not even notice that it's poetry, okay? You can see how it is if you read the afterword, but in general, it's just -- it looks just kind of like a conversation that the kids are having with each other. So the teacher starts out on page one. Her name is Ms. Chang. She says, "Imagine that your home is on fire. You're allowed to save one thing. Your family and pets are safe, so don't worry about them. Your most important thing, any size -- a grand piano? Fine." And then the students take off and start discussing the one thing that they would save. So I hope that it will be a thought exercise and an inspiration for teachers and students to think about the one thing they'd save, and how the things that are important in our lives connect us to other people, and to ourselves. So let's see. I also have a picture book which was just signed, a picture book text. So it probably won't be out for at least a couple of years, because there isn't even an illustrator yet. But it's for very young children, and it's called "Smiling Eyes." And it's a book that looks to dismantle that single story about Asian eyes, right? So it's just -- some of you may know my very young picture book for kids called "Bee-bim Bop," and it's that audience that I'm kind of aiming for. I was delighted to see that Joanna Ho has "Eyes That Kiss in the Corners," which is a similar topic, and she's coming out with another one on that topic next year. And that's definitely targeted at older children than mine, so that -- we're going to have more stories, you know, along those lines, I hope, over the next few years. And I think that's really important, because numbers are important. Any time you have very few books from a marginalized community, each book bears too much burden of representation. We need not tens or dozens, but we need hundreds and hundreds of books from every community. Because then, if you don't like it, or if it's not your experience, there's another one, right? And right now, there is often not enough others, other books for you to look at. So that's what I hope the work on We Need Diverse Books is doing, to get those numbers up into the hundreds and thousands of books by people from marginalized communities, and about those kids.

>> It's unfortunately time for us to say goodbye, but I wanted to thank everyone for tuning in today, and a big thank-you to Linda Sue Park for joining us. It was such a pleasure to hear you speak today. For any of our viewers, you can request both "Prairie Lotus" and "The One Thing You'd Save" at the New York Public Library for pickup at your local grab-and-go branch, or by using the Simply E app. And you can join us for more author programs at [NYPL.org/watchandlearn](http://NYPL.org/watchandlearn).