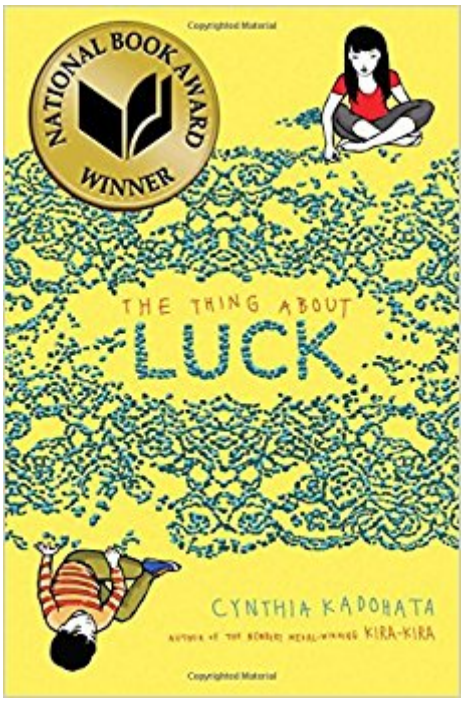
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The Thing About Luck



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Synopsis

There is bad luck, good luck, and making your own luck--which is exactly what Summer must do to save her family in this winner of the National Book Award by Newbery Medalist Cynthia Kadohata.Summer knows that kouun means "good luck" in Japanese, and this year her family has none of it. Just when she thinks nothing else can possibly go wrong, an emergency whisks her parents away to Japan--right before harvest season. Summer and her little brother are left in the care of their grandparents -- Obaachan and Jiichan -- Ã Â who come out of retirement in order to harvest wheat and help pay the bills. The thing about Obaachan and Jiichan is that they are old-fashioned and demanding, and between helping Obaachan cook for the workers, covering for her when her back pain worsens, and worrying about her lonely little brother, Summer just barely has time to notice the attentions of their boss's cute son. But notice she does, and what begins as a welcome distraction from the hard work soon turns into a mess of its own. Having thoroughly disappointed her grandmother, Summer figures the bad luck must be finished--but then it gets worse. And when that happens, Summer has to figure out how to change it herself, even if it means further displeasing Obaachan. Because it might be the only way to save her family. Cynthia Kadohata's ode to the breadbasket of America has received six starred reviews and was named on numerous "best of" lists for 2013.

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

Customer Reviews

Gr 5-8-Fans of Kadohata's Kira-Kira (S & S, 2004) will welcome this similarly gentle, character-driven exploration of familial bonds, this time set in the contemporary Midwest. With their parents called away to care for relatives in Japan, 12-year-old Summer and her younger brother, Jaz, accompany their grandparents, performing the grueling work that comes with the harvest season. In her likable voice, Summer observes the varying excitement, tedium, and challenges of harvesting wheat, sprinkling her narration with casual turns of phrase such as "OMG" and "epic fail" that will endear her to readers. Strong family ties suffuse this novel with a tremendous amount of heart. Though Summer's brother has been diagnosed with a number of disorders, she prefers to think of him as simply "intense," and, like most siblings, is alternately protective of and annoyed by his idiosyncrasies. Her grandparents, comically strict Obaachan and kindly Jiichan, bring warmth and humor with their cultural and generational differences. Kadohata expertly captures the uncertainties of the tween years as Summer navigates the balance of childlike concerns with the onset of increasingly grown-up responsibilities. She ponders the fragility of life after a brush with death from malaria, experiences newfound yearnings upon becoming preoccupied with a boy, and bravely steps up to save the day when her grandfather falls ill. The book's leisurely pace and extensive information about grain harvesting require some amount of patience from readers, but their investment will be rewarded by Summer's satisfying journey to self-actualization.-Allison Tran, Mission Viejo Library, CAÃ Â (c) Copyright 2013. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review It seems that if SummerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Japanese American family didnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t have bad luck, theyÃ¢â ¬â„¢d have no luck at all. Certainly good luck (kouun) is elusive. Consider that Summer has had malaria; her little brother, Jaz, is friendless; her parents have to fly to Japan to take care of elderly relatives; and her grandmother (Obaa-chan) and grandfather (Jii-chan) must pay the mortgage by coming out of retirement to work for a custom harvesting company. When the siblings accompany their grandparents on the harvest, Summer helps her grandmother, a cook, while Jaz is Jaz: intense, focused, and bad-tempered. At first, things go reasonably well, but then Jii-chan becomes sick, and it appears that it might be up to Summer to save the day. Will she succeed? Kadohata has written a gentle family story that is unusual in its focus on the mechanics of wheat harvesting. Readers may skim the more arcane aspects of the labor-intensive work, focusing

instead on the emotionally rich and often humorous dynamics of SummerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s relationship with her old-fashioned but endearing grandparents and her troubled younger brother. Another engaging novel from the Newbery MedalÃ¢â ¬â œwinning Kadohata. HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY: With the blogosphere already starting to buzz, and author appearances and web promotions planned, KadohataÃ¢â ¬â„¢s already sizable audience will likely increase with this title. Grades 4-8. --Michael Cart --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

IÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ve read Cynthia KadohataÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s "Weedflower" and "Kira-Kira," and while I really enjoyed those books, "The Thing About Luck" is my favorite of hers. What I like about this book is that even if youÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢re not Japanese, and you havenÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t nearly died of malaria, and you donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t know a thing about wheat harvesting, itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s still a story almost everyone can relate to in some way, because itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s all about dealing with bad luckÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •or, in other words, life. But let me back up a little.Twelve-year-old Summer is a survivor. She has recently recovered from malaria, which she contracted when an infected mosquito bit her. Now, even though she is terrified of mosquitos, she draws pictures of them in her sketchbookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •a most unusual way to confront her fear. Unfortunately, her malaria is just the beginning of a long season of bad luck for Summer and her family. Her parents suddenly have to go to Japan for a family emergency, which means her grandparents have to come out of retirement to take their place working as cross-country wheat harvesters. This is not going to be easy, as SummerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s grandmother recently started suffering from excruciating back pain. Also, Summer and her brother Jaz, who canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t seem to make a single friend because heÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s so different, have to come along with their grandparents and help out.As someone with Japanese heritage, I thought it was super cool to read a book in which two of the characters go by Obaachan (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“GrandmaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•) and Jiichan (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“GrandpaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•), nearly identical to what I call my own grandparents. Also, Summer mentions Japanese cultural things here and there, such as umeboshi (pickled plums) and jan ken pon (the Japanese version of rock, paper, scissors).However, as I said before, you donÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t have to be Japanese to appreciate this book, not by any means. Summer doesnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t make a big deal out of her ethnic heritageÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s just one part of who she is. Nor do you have to have any knowledge of wheat harvesting or malaria. Summer talks about wheat harvesting and her bout with malaria matter-of-factly as part of her life experience. And I think thatÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s the

beauty of this book. ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s not really about getting malaria, or being Japanese, or working as a wheat harvester. What itÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s really about is one girlÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s experience with a season of bad luck, unwanted responsibilities, her first crush, mixed embarrassment and pride for her family, feelings of inadequacy, and the discovery of her inner strength. Those things are pretty universal, no matter what your background or experience.Spoiler alert: Summer and her family do not get out of their spell of bad luck by winning the lottery. "The Thing About Luck" shows that bad luck just happens sometimes, and the best way to combat it is to look inside yourself and figure out what you can do to make a positive change.

Rating: 3.5/5The Thing About Luck is narrated by Summer, a twelve-year-old girl, who is the daughter and granddaughter of Japanese-American wheat harvesters, who travel from farm to farm during harvest season. SummerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s parents have returned to Japan to care for some sick relatives, leaving Summer and her brother, Jaz, with their grandparents.SummerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s grandmother is strict and formal, and rides Summer mercilessly. She is harsh and mean and demanding. But her grandfather tells Summer and Jaz bedtime stories and reminds them: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“You find magic everywhere, in wheat field, in mosquito, even hereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“in the town of Lost Springs, Wyoming, which had a population of fourÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•). Obaachan and Jiichan had an arranged marriage and have been together over fifty years, and they gripe at each other incessantly.The book follows Summer, Jaz, and their grandparents during part of one harvest season. Summer is at a critical age. She is making the transition into adulthood, becoming more responsible, and figuring out the deal with boys. Her grandparents are getting older, her brother is getting weirder, she is growing up, and the whole family is suffering from a year of bad luck.The Thing About Luck won the National Book Award for Young PeopleÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s Literature this year. The reading level is very basic (AR level 4.7), but it tackles a lot of issues, including cultural differences, generational differences, anxiety (Summer has a pretty intense fear of mosquitos following a bout of malaria), and autism (SummerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s brother has been to three different doctors and received three different diagnoses: OCD, ADHD, and PDD-NOS). ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s also an informative look at the life of traveling wheat harvesters (something I, for one, knew nothing about).The writing is smooth and easy, and the book is peppered with cute illustrations (SummerÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s drawings of mosquitos and combines and such).

Another wonderful discovery in my search for age-appropriate books for a grandchild who reads

several levels above grade. I found it in the NY Times Book Review, downloaded a sample on my Kindle, read that, and ordered a hard copy as a gift for my granddaughter. Not only did she read and enjoy it, but so did her father, who in turn recommended that I read the whole book. Which I did, and loved it. I describe the writing style as 'spare', but it's a quite elegant use of language and a very thoughtful story that deals with some difficult issues without trying for the sensational. And I learned all about wheat harvesting!

Confession: I haven't talked to kids about this book yet. But my guess is that many would find it difficult to relate to the migrant workers' life and get bogged down in the details. That said, the portrayal of family relationships trumps the agrarian limitations. This book earns its shelf space by its depiction of the grandparent's love demonstrated by high expectations and hard work and the role of a sibling with what appears to be an autistic spectrum disorder

Awesome book!! If you are learning English, this is the kind of book for you!

Oftentimes I read coming of age stories dealing with love as the primary focus. This focused more on the main character putting aside her fears and accepting new responsibility as part of stepping into the role of leadership in her family.

Different setting for this book, which she researched well. Obachan and Ojichan's English was quite good as they tried to guide Jaz and Summer in the Midwest. Doing farm work in the wheat fields was difficult and stressful but ultimately "luck" was on their side. Adolescence is hard enough and harder within this multigenerational Japanese-American family.

Lovely book about immigrant family. I read this at the suggestion of my niece. It is a good book to read with a younger relative. Generational experience shared with another family is a cherished experience for me. So, it could be a "family" read. Lovely passages.

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