



So Far From the Bamboo Grove: Novel-Ties Study Guide

By Yoko Kawashima Watkins

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The riveting story of a Japanese family's escape from Korea to their war-ravaged home. Ages 10-14.
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From School Library Journal

Grade 6 Up A true account that is filled with violence and death, yet one that is ultimately a story of family love and life. Eleven-year-old Yoko Kawashima had led a peaceful and secure life as the daughter of a Japanese government official stationed in North Korea near the end of World War II. Abruptly, all is changed as she, her older sister Ko, and their mother flee the vengeance-seeking North Korean Communists and eventually make their way to an unwelcoming and war-ravaged Japan. Yoko's story is spellbinding. She often escapes death by mere chance; her brother, Hideyo, separated from the family, has an equally harrowing escape. The longed-for arrival in Japan proves to be an almost greater trial, as their mother, defeated by the discovery that all their Japanese relatives are dead, dies. Together, Yoko and Ko create a home in which to await the return of Hideyo. Watkins writes clearly and movingly, with a straightforward style through which the story unfolds quickly. She skillfully alternates her account of the girls' journey with that of their brother, maintaining readers' interest in both. Watkins is able to describe scenes of death, rape, and other atrocities with a simple directness which has no trace of sensationalism yet in no way diminishes their horror. Readers will be riveted by the events of the escape and struggle for survival, and enriched and inspired by the personalities of the family. Especially well drawn is Yoko's gradual emergence from a frightened, whining child to a strong and courageous young girl. Parallels can be drawn to Holocaust survival stories such as Aranka Siegal's *Upon the Head of the Goat* (Farrar, 1981) and Esther Hautzig's *The Endless Steppe* (Crowell, 1968). *So Far from the Bamboo Grove* should have a place among the finest of them. Louise L. Sherman, Anna C. Scott School, Leonia, N.J.
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About the Author

Yoko Kawashima Watkins received The Courage of Conscience Award from the Peace Abbey in Sherborn, Massachusetts, which cited her as an "inspiration to young people throughout America and the world."

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