



## The Friendship Doll

*Kirby Larson*

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# The Friendship Doll

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## **The Friendship Doll** Kirby Larson

I am Miss Kanagawa. In 1927, my 57 doll-sisters and I were sent from Japan to America as Ambassadors of Friendship. Our work wasn't all peach blossoms and tea cakes. My story will take you from New York to Oregon, during the Great Depression. Though few in this tale are as fascinating as I, their stories won't be an unpleasant diversion. You will make the acquaintance of Bunny, bent on revenge; Lois, with her head in the clouds; Willie Mae, who not only awakened my heart, but broke it; and Lucy, a friend so dear, not even war could part us. I have put this tale to paper because from those 58 Friendship Dolls only 45 remain. I know that someone who chooses this book is capable of solving the mystery of the missing sisters. Perhaps that someone is you.

## **The Friendship Doll Details**

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Author : Kirby Larson

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## **From Reader Review The Friendship Doll for online ebook**

### **Julie says**

This book was FABULOUS. It would have been at the top of my reading list in 3-4-5 grade. "The Friendship Doll" has everything I loved (and still love really), strong female characters, historical fiction, a little bit of magic/fantasy, talk of travels, dolls that come to life, a cool pack horse librarian, and an eccentric older woman who collects things.

I should create a shelf titled, "Books I feel were written just for me."

\*I just created a shelf titled "Books i feel were written just for me"

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### **Kayla says**

Historical fiction is, by far, my favorite genre, but it is rare to find historical fiction that is appropriate and worth reading for younger readers. This book had such a unique premise, and I ended up doing a little internet research to find out more about the Japanese dolls because I found it so interesting! I wasn't sure how well it would work to have the book divided up into four shorter stories, but it felt natural and enhanced the doll's story line. The stories occur between 1927 and 1941, and each main character had a distinct personality. In each story, the doll helped someone to make a good and/or important decision. I really liked that each story had a different feel to it, and there was great detail added to help the reader recognize what was going on at that particular time. It was a great read overall, and I will definitely be looking at other books by this author in hopes that I will find more great historical fiction for my daughters!

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### **Colby Sharp says**

Can't imagine ever reading another book that centered around a doll that I could like more than The Friendship Doll. Loved the character development of the doll.

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### **Kate Willis says**

This was such a fascinating introduction to a little known historical event. I loved following the ambassador doll through history on her sweet errands. (And the writing style was not dull on the least.) ;) The only thing that let me from giving it a higher rating were a few attitude and worldview issues put forth, but I still think it's worth it for older readers. ;)

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### **katsok says**

After attending NCTE and having friends comment on the fact that I hadn't read this book and why haven't I

read it and when was I going to read it, I set about to right this wrong. What a perfectly wonderful book. In many ways it reminds me of The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by DiCamillo in that there is an object at the center of the books that is on a journey and needs to understand what love is about. In this book it is a doll, a simply beautiful doll.

Larson uses the fact that in the late 1920's 58 friendship dolls were sent from Japan to America. The dolls went on tours and most ended up in museums. This book follows the story of one doll, Miss Kanagawa, but also the story of four children who interact with her and how they are changed as a result. Some of the stories were heartbreaking, some uplifting, all moving. I am grateful for my friends and their push to finally read this beautiful novel.

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## **Bluerose's Heart says**

This book is based on actual events and people. Most of it is purely fiction, though. I think Amazon's description sums the story up pretty well:

"I am Miss Kanagawa. In 1927, my 57 doll-sisters and I were sent from Japan to America as Ambassadors of Friendship. Our work wasn't all peach blossoms and tea cakes. My story will take you from New York to Oregon, during the Great Depression. Though few in this tale are as fascinating as I, their stories won't be an unpleasant diversion. You will make the acquaintance of Bunny, bent on revenge; Lois, with her head in the clouds; Willie Mae, who not only awakened my heart, but broke it; and Lucy, a friend so dear, not even war could part us. I have put this tale to paper because from those 58 Friendship Dolls only 45 remain. I know that someone who chooses this book is capable of solving the mystery of the missing sisters. Perhaps that someone is you"

This book is broken up into sections. Each of the girls has their own story, so other than Kanagawa, they have nothing to do with each other. It makes it much easier if you happen to be reading to a child or children. It doesn't take very long to read each story. As an adult, though, there are a couple of the stories that I would have loved to be longer, especially Willie Mae's.

Lawson does a wonderful job of writing about the Depression. I think this book could help young readers better understand what kids went through during this tough time. It might even teach all of us just how good we have it now. In Lucy's story, she writes a letter to Mrs. Roosevelt. This line just broke my heart:

"I've had breakfast three times in one week! I'll be so fat soon, I won't fit in my overalls."

How sad!

I only have one complaint about the whole book. I didn't really care for this line:

"It wasn't that the Good Lord didn't heed Willie Mae's prayers in general. It was this latest one He paid no nevermind to."

I just don't think God ignores any of our prayers, so some explaining could be in order for children learning about prayer. This isn't a Christian book, though.

The Friendship Doll was a very sweet, but heartbreaking story. It's entertainment and education rolled into one. :)

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### **Barbara says**

This is another satisfying piece of historical fiction from the always-reliable Kirby Larson. I was mesmerized by the story from its opening pages and read it in one installment. I love how history is woven with the creative imaginings of "What if?" from the author. Fifty-eight dolls actually were sent to this country as Ambassadors of Friendship from Japan in response to doll gifts sent to Japan from the United States earlier. Larson imagines the travels and brief encounters one particular doll, the elegant Miss Kanagawa, has with four--make that five--youngsters. I wasn't sure how the doll would be passed from one person to the next and was at first disappointed to leave Bunny (the first girl whose life is changed by the doll) and move on to Lois. But somehow, the stories of Lois, Willie Mae, and Lucy drew me in as well, and I kept reading. Not only does this doll impart wisdom, remind us of how a friend should behave, and instill hope, but she also breaks a heart or two, one of which was mine. I came to care about these girls whose lives were not easy during the Depression, and by the time the narrative reached the point of Pearl Harbor, I knew that no gift from the Japanese would be cherished. Larson's ability to conjure uneasiness about our nation's behavior during that time period is simply uncanny.

In this book, Larson has given readers a story that promises to stay in the reader's heart and mind, reminding us that even the smallest acts have enduring consequences. Over and over, I kept thinking about the many ways different kinds of friendships played out in the book. The story itself is compelling, and Larson's use of vocabulary, references, and phrasing to fit the times and places she covers is impressive. This one is absolutely not to be missed.

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### **Kelly Butcher says**

Read my review here:  
[http://thelemmelibrary.blogspot.com/2...](http://thelemmelibrary.blogspot.com/2011/09/the-doll-ambassadors.html)

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### **Margi says**

I can't say enough about this book. I read it in an hour because I could not put it down. I was not familiar with the Friendship Doll Program and this story takes that actual event and intermingles it with wonderful fiction. It touches on different times in American history and interweaves the story of the doll and the story of the children and their families. The book takes us to the Chicago's World Fair, to the Pack Horse Librarians of Kentucky, to the Dust Bowl of Oklahoma. This is the BEST young reader story I have read in years. LOVED IT!!!

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### **Wendy says**

I don't know quite what it is, but for some reason this book really annoyed me, and I found it more annoying the further along I got. It started off pretty well, and I wondered how much weight I should put to the feeling that it was strongly derivative of Hitty, Her First Hundred Years. (Not just the idea of a doll moving through

time, witnessing American history, belonging to and affecting different children, etc--goodness, you'd think that'd be enough, wouldn't you?--but the doll's personality and voice.) As I read on, I stopped being concerned with that because I didn't like the book very much anyway.

I don't want to pile on the criticism, because I don't hate the book or find it offensive or anything, but just a few things: it felt overly lesson-y, very much like each story was only there to teach that lesson. It seemed like a lot of time/pages were spent on world-and-character building with each girl's story, with very little time left for interesting plot development. One of the things I like about short stories (and this book is pretty much a series of connected short stories) is that they usually don't waste time getting somewhere. This book is more like the start of several different novels, with then a quick summary of the action in the rest of the novels.

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### **Susie says**

Each of the stories in this book could stand alone; Larson was able to include so much in just 200 pages. At first I would be disappointed that one story was finished and I had to start over again, but each story became very compelling. I really enjoy books that make me want to find out more about their background (if based on fact), and this one encouraged me to find out more about the friendship dolls. I imagine that students reading this book may not have a lot of knowledge about WPA, the poor treatment of "Okies", and the Chicago World's Fair, but they will be entertained while learning. Each character who interacts with "Miss Kanagawa" has much to be sad about (even if one is rich), but they all ultimately have a redeeming spirit and love of learning. Larson's notes at the end add to the interest, and could be used to encourage students to write some of their own historical fiction-- or at least letters. A bonus for me was that I read this the day after I got to meet Candace Fleming, who described some of her experiences researching Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt, who both figure in parts of this book.

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### **Jane says**

As a piece of writing, I found much to love in this book, particularly the multiple vividly rendered main characters, the historical detail, and the thought-provoking nature of some of the author's plot choices. Partial spoiler alert: The death of an important character was shocking to me, and left me thinking (still thinking) about the way most lives do not follow a satisfying narrative structure with closure, as was the case here. They are simply cut off, particularly when young people die suddenly. This is a hard topic for me as an adult and I think it will be challenging for children. I'm not sure I would have liked this aspect of the book as a child, but it would certainly have been thought as well as emotion provoking.

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### **Carol says**

Sometimes you find good book in a round about way. Sometimes you can't remember exactly how you got there. I think this is how I found *The Friendship Doll* by Kirby Larson. A conversation with friends on GR regarding stolen treasures or art led me to searching for some new books on the subject. Larson's book came up in the search. Considering this book is meant for young readers, I normally would have passed it by but the subject piqued my interest and the author had won a Newbery Honor Winner to boot. Our library owned it. I'm in.

## **"Beginnings"**

*When the Japanese give a doll in friendship, it is bestowed with great meaning and honor....Even adults speak about dolls as though they were almost human. A doll is not simply stored in a box. She sleeps waiting for a child to wake her."*

--Jaimie Tobias Neely

*The Spokesman-Review (Spokane, Washington)*

*March 3, 1993*

This is how the story begins and then immediately jumps back to Japan, 1927 where an old Master Doll-Maker Tatsuhiko, is finishing what he knows will be his last doll. This one is very special as it is to carry a message of friendship across the oceans to the United States. His creation, Miss Kanagawa, is beautifully described as the size of a 5 year old, with black hair, more exquisite than a doll he had made for the empress. Wearing the kimono his wife stitched for their daughter's last birthday, her fifth, it is a rich cloth of blue chrysanthemums against orange silk. Tatsuhiko sends her off with these words *Safe travels, little sister*

In 1927, 58 dolls were sent to the US by the children of Japan in the spirit of friendship. Larson weaves this historical event into a story based on fact, but makes it her own by intertwining the story of Miss Kanagawa's journey from her arrival in New York to the present. The seed for the story began while Larson was researching her book *Hattie Big Sky*. She ran across a 1920's picture of a young Montana farm girl in overalls holding this stunning doll, dressed in finery, sparking her need to write this imagined tale.

The story is told through the eyes of several children through the years, but at its center is always the voice of Miss Kanagawa. Consider the times, depression, The New Deal, people out of work, the dust bowl, poverty, hunger, a westward movement, The Chicago World's Fair, giving a background for Larson to paint her story. And then, December 7th, 1941 and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Just as in real life, this bombing, causes suspicion and a distrust of the Japanese, realistically portrayed here. Some of the Friendship Dolls were destroyed because they were Japanese, some were salvaged as people couldn't bear to obliterate their beauty.

*The Friendship Doll* touched me and is one I will want to share with others. It is hard for me to see it from a young reader's eyes but I think they would like it. It is a story that set me off on a quest to know more about the dolls. Larson provides a great deal of information in her author notes. She outlines what is real and where she took license with the history she portrays. I thank her for this. She gives websites where research and a continued effort to find the dolls endures.

I'd recommend viewing W. Gordon's site at Wesleyan. It has a great deal of fascinating information. For Connecticut readers, you can read more about the doll given to our state Miss Chosen which resides at The Children's Museum, West Hartford.

I believe this would make a good book for discussion, perhaps a mother-daughter but even for adults. There is much to talk about. Sibling rivalry, US history, our relationship with Japan through history, different cultures, the varying Asian races, the lure of dolls, lost art, craft, etc. Then there's the other story of the American Blue-Eyed Dolls that we sent to Japanese children. This is the true beginning but that's a story for another day.

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**Dori says**

This is a delicious book that made me smile many times. Miss Kanagawa, a three-foot-tall doll hand-made in Japan, came to the United States in 1927, along with 57 other dolls, as an ambassador of friendship. That much is a true story. What American children might she have met, and how might she have affected their lives? That is where Kirby Larson's vivid imagination kicks in.

A rich, spoiled girl in New York City in 1928. A daughter of an unemployed mechanic in Chicago in the early days of the Depression. A lively reader from a fatherless family in "the holler" in backwoods Kentucky in 1937. An Okie girl whose family lost their farm in the Dust Bowl and had to look for work on the West Coast. A modern-day boy in Seattle.

At first I thought the messages about friendship, as given by this doll, might be clichéd, but Newbery Honor Winning author Kirby Larson doesn't do clichés. Each of these children speaks with a clear, distinctive voice, using fresh metaphors and images true to their time and place. Even Miss Kanagawa has attitude. And all of these compelling mini-stories have surprise endings!

I highly recommend this book, especially for girls who think they have outgrown their love for dolls.

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### **Sophie Muller says**

Wow! I was a bit weary to read a book dealing with Japanese culture from someone who isn't Japanese, but I was proven wrong. No stereotypes, but rather fantastic in-depth thinking regarding kindness (Bunny helping her friend instead of tripping her during her speech), friendship (Lois buying a souvenir for her less lucky friend at the Chicago fair instead of riding an attraction that would have made her feel like flying, her cherished dreams), old vs. young age (with Willie Mae Marcum reading to old Mrs. Weldon - handkerchief out everybody!), endurance and resilience (with Lucy Turner and her father during the Dirty Thirty in the US).

I'm actually looking forward to reading more books about the 1930's in the US: I cannot believe this country went through such a rough time and came out of it. Impressed and I'm looking for inspiration.

Last but not least, the doll's again itself brings great perspectives on learning (bad is intertwined with good) and caring, no matter what.

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