Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood Study Guide

Lost Names: Scenes from a Korean Boyhood by Richard E. Kim

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

This quasi-historical non-fictional novel, published in 1970, occurs between 1932 and 1945 and presents the growth and development of a thirteen year-old boy through his eyes. The reader is immediately drawn into the family circle where he or she grows sympathetic to the boy and his nuclear and extended family. The simple straightforward language of Lost Names makes the work easily understood and presents a reality appreciated even beyond the tragic environment of a world at war. Richard E. Kim, the author of Lost Names, was born in Hamheung, North Korea. Kim entered the United States in 1955, after he served from 1950-1954 in the Republic of Korea Marines and Army. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen who attended several American universities from 1955 to 1963.

Kim was born in 1932 and grew up in Korea as a boy like the one in Lost Names. Although the work is not strictly autobiographical, according to the author, most readers accept "that the young boy, the first-person narrator, is the author himself." Kim wrote a series of seven fictional tales about a Korean boy perceived and classified ironically as a non-fictional account of his life. Kim claims autobiography is neither pure non-fiction nor is pure fiction. He leaves it up to the reader to evaluate Lost Names as whatever they would like it to be since, he writes, it was written for them. This 198-page quasi non-fiction book is comprised of seven unnumbered but titled chapters ranging from 17seventeen to thirty-seven pages. Each chapter is a vignette, or short literary sketch or description, of an event in the boy's life. Each episode reflects a significant experience in the boy's growth from infancy to teenage. Kim writes in simple language as a young Korean boy would. Each word or phrase is packed with what a young boy might feel. For example, on the day they lost their names he walks home in snow thinking over, "my new name, my old name, my true name, my not-true name?" The child finally says "I am going to lose my name; I am going to lose my name; we are all going to lose our names.""

Each chapter title expresses the content of the chapter so the reader is forewarned about what can be expected. For example, the opening chapter discussing the trek from Korea into Manchuria is titled "Crossing." The episode dealing with their name change from Korean to Japanese is succinctly titled "Lost Names." Chapter episodes skip over less significant intervening years. Except for minor characters, the important people in the story have no names but the generic familial identifying roles like father, mother and grandmother. This literary peculiarity enhances their significance by universalizing them to all Koreans and perhaps beyond to any race of people disenfranchised by an occupying force. Paradoxically, this depersonalization makes them more endearing. The poignancy of having no given name is made more devastating by the loss of their ancestral family name as well. This personal destruction is the goal of an occupying race but the father's choice of Iwamoto anchored the ancestral family's "Foundation of Rock" to start anew.

Crossing

Crossing Summary and Analysis

This quasi-historical non-fictional novel, published in 1970, occurs between 1932 and 1945 and presents the growth and development of a thirteen year-old through his eyes. The reader is immediately drawn into the family circle where he or she grows sympathetic to the boy and his nuclear and extended family. They reach the bridge on their daylong journey at twilight by the small border town that separates northern Korea, Manchuria and Siberia at the Tuman River. The year is 1933 and the boy is one year old. A young Korean mother in western-style clothes watches her husband and father of her baby boy taken off the train by Japanese at the railroad station just before the border. They stop at the last Korean town before entering Manchuria. A Japanese Thought Police detective and Japanese Military Policeman enter the train to ask her husband for papers and accuse him of not wasting any time to get out of the country. He was jailed for years from activities in resistance-movements and only a week ago was released from parole. His papers are in order and he has official permission to travel. He has a job with foreign missionaries to teach biology and chemistry in high school. Police accuse them of feeling sorry for him and trying to protect him. He says he is a Christian and his wife's parents are Christian missionaries. She will teach music in kindergarten. The detective says he must come along to speak to Military Police, but he fears the train might depart without him. She sees them enter the station from the train window. The conductor enters the compartment to collect the tickets that her husband has. A young Korean high school student knows her husband's reputation and explains the situation to the Korean conductor, who is sympathetic to the young mother. The train unexpectedly lurches ahead, so the young wife insists she get off with her baby despite the young boy and conductor's pleas to stay. The conductor offers his friend, a station clerk's help, and the boy offers to get her suitcases across. She prays on the platform, "Lord help me."

She waits on the platform till dark for her husband who she fears is in jail. The clerk opens the window and invites her in from the cold. She is absorbed in her thoughts and prayer but begins to cry when her husband shows up to hold her and the baby. He is bruised about the face. They enter the station to drink hot tea and eat warm rice cakes. The clerk says there is another train coming but they decide to walk over the frozen river rather than wait any longer since there are people waiting for them on the other side. Within one half hour they reach the bank of the river crossing and are allowed to pass by a Korean guard at the small warming hut. They follow an older couple who crossed many times. They fear falling in halfway across where the ice is full of fishing holes. When they are almost at the other side they can see people waiting on the bank. The town they traveled to was surrounded by the Chinese but became a Korean ghetto where they will teach Korean children. The mother fears the thin ice as they get closer to the end of their crossing. Thirty years later, she reflects on their crossing with her now grown boy and looks back on the many times they have traveled over thin ice.

Homecoming

Homecoming Summary and Analysis

The boy's first day at the new school is in second grade. The Japanese principal wanted him in first grade because his first year was in a missionary school. The family returned to Korea a week earlier from Manchuria so the eldest son by tradition could help his father with farming and the family apple orchard. The boy's father knew the assistant principal. He asked the principal to let the boy qualify by testing for second grade. The evening meal with grandfather, father and boy celebrated his testing. Grandfather asked the boy if he knew his father did things to be proud of, but father said he was too young. Grandfather warned him the Japanese will be mean to him but not to cry when they are.

On the way to his first day at school, both mother and father accompany him part of the way. They pass the well where they are greeted by many neighbors at a small town square. Father leaves them on his bicycle at an intersection to the main road. A bigger boy in the same school uniform follows behind them past small shops on the left side of the road. The road has little huts and dingy houses on it with thatched roofs, unlike the tile roof over their house. Other children gather on the way laughing, squealing and shouting. At the gate he says goodbye to his mother and runs off to join children his size in the field. A larger boy whose armband says "Student of the Day" greets the new boy and tells a class leader from second grade to "Look after him." He stands in a row next to a dirty little boy who looks like he just woke and sees the big boy who followed them to school a few rows ahead. Students line up in formation and each class leader reports to the Student of the Day, who shouts, "At ease." At another shout, they turn east and bow to the Japanese Emperor's palace in Tokyo before the students go to class. It is 1938 when he starts school here. Classroom slogans indicate Japan annexed Korea in 1910, Manchuria in 1934 and China in 1937. In 1939, the Second World War began.

The new boy is embarrassed when he has to sing a song, according to their custom. He sings "Danny Boy" in English. The new boy is sad when school is let out so they can go to a movie. The big boy that followed him to school says he saw the movie and asks if he wants to swim at the river instead. They agree to meet later and one of the other boys calls the big boy Pumpkin. Before leaving the classroom, a big tall mustachioed man in teacher's uniform talks to the boy in Japanese that he cannot understand. He slaps and screams at him again and again. One of two boys there says he lied and heard him sing a foreign song. When he says his father is a criminal, the new boy smashes the other boy's face with his head and punches his stomach. When the new boy's teacher tells the Japanese teacher to leave him alone, they fight with each other. The new boy's teacher wins and takes him home. They stopd at a Chinese restaurant where the teacher buys steamed cakes with meat and vegetables. The owner wraps four cakes for him to take along. At home he goes to bed until his mother wakes him to say fourteen friends led by Pumpkin are there to see him. They eat watermelon and drink ice water with honey while talking about their black belt teacher who upended the Japanese teacher with a finger. They talk about a swim in the river, but mother says he

should rest until the doctor sees him. He tells Pumpkin about the cakes. Mother asks him back after the swim and says she would warm them.

His father talks to him about the "criminal" comment and that he was in prison while in college long ago but will tell him about it later. Father confirms he has done nothing in his life to be ashamed of. Grandfather asks them to dinner together with chicken and fried meat dumplings that are reserved for special occasions. Mother brings warmed rice wine with two cups, but grandfather got a third cup for his grandson when she leaves. He fills three cups with wine. They toast each other and have another cup. The boy's teacher joins them and they share a wine. It is late and the boy is excused to bed. Mother asks if he wants to go to another school, but he wants to be class leader. He asks if Pumpkin came for cakes. Mother says he drowned in the river.

Once upon aTime, on a Sunday

Once upon aTime, on a Sunday Summary and Analysis

Sundays are early, busy days for the third-grader as he pretends to be asleep, hoping for more time before mother makes him get up. She expects a baby in a few months, one that he hopes will be a brother instead of another sister. It is the end of August, with school still on vacation. The family stays at the orchard in a small cottage but go to town, where the grandparents stay in the main house on Sundays. Mother and sister ride in the oxcart but the boy and his father ride bicycles. The boy dislikes Sunday because he must rise early so his parents and sister get to the Presbyterian church soon enough for mother to practice piano with the choir. The boy goes to Sunday morning assembly at school for a lecture by the Japanese principal, exercises, work assignments and errands for teachers since he is class leader. He'd rather play but the Korean teacher won't release him as class leader.

On Sundays, they eat at his grandparents' in town, where grandmother makes a big breakfast for everyone. She serves soup, eggs, squash, beef, fish, cucumber, eggplant, cabbage, rice and many other things since feeding the family is her mission. They arrive late and the boy rushes through eating to leave. He likes to get there early to talk and play before assembly since they do not wear uniforms on vacation. He talked with his friends about kite-flying that he is an expert at making and flying. Their hair is short so they look like small Buddhist monks. A new boy said his brother thought about being a monk before the army made him "Special Volunteer Soldier" to fight with the Japanese soldiers. Another boy's brother was killed in China and his ashes returned in an urn. He gives the boy a slingshot he made and they line up for the assembly.

The classroom is dank and musty from disuse during vacation. The teacher speaks to the boy in Japanese about a map he wants to hang. Countries on his old world map are blue if they're with Japan and include Germany and Italy, or red if they oppose Japan and include England, France, Russia and other nations except America, which is a big white blank. His new map is the same except Russia is green with a green line to Germany labeled "German-Russian Mutual Non-aggression Treaty, August 23, 1939." His Korean teacher is uncertain what it meant and asks what his father will do after church. The boy said they're going to the bookstore after lunch and the teacher said he's going there too. The boy's grandmother warns his father to be careful since the teacher was sneaky as a boy. At the bookstore, the boy looks for a magazine for his sister while his father, teacher and store owner whisper about what it means. He overhears "nonaggression" and a few other words. The store owner warns the teacher, whose eyes tear up, to keep watchful. Father takes the boy from the store after their "dangerous" conversation.

Father and son return for dinner with grandparents and stay until early evening. Father sends the oxcart driver home on his bicycle to have dinner with his family. He will drive it

back to the orchard. The boy helps a young tenant farmer feed the oxen, who says he wants to get married and start a family like other tenant farmers. The boy sits next to his father, where he felt secure on the oxcart as the moon floated peacefully in the night sky. Father wakes him at the orchard's gate where another farmer will take care of the oxen and cart. The boy is amazed by millions of stars twinkling in the dark heavens. Mother sends him to bed and asks why he is crying, but the boy says he doesn't know.

Lost Names

Lost Names Summary and Analysis

February is the gloomiest and dreariest time of the winter and seems to last without end in the northern region of Korea. The snow is wet, heavy and covers earlier layers with brittle sheets of ice. Snow falls constantly and covers up the river for skating but doesn't make good snowmen. Father calls the boy and his sister to breakfast since mother is in Pyongyang at her parents with their new baby sister. The boy and his sister argue about white rice grandmother puts in his lunch box. He told father his lunch was taken because it had white rice like rich boys get and the others teased him. He misses mother since she puts barley and millet in his lunch like other boys so he doesn't feel like he's showing off. They don't get much white rice anymore because the government makes them send white rice, meat and fowl to Japan, that they must call the "mainland." Grandmother wants her family to live better that she did, which was why she and grandfather worked hard to provide for them. She feels bad now that they can afford rice, chicken and meat, but can't have them because of the Japanese. The boy's sister apologizes for arguing and he apologizes to grandmother for complaining. She gives him a hot sweet potato to keep him warm now and eat for a snack later. The young farmer gives him three logs for class.

At school, the Japanese teacher nicknamed "Chopstick" tells them they would have no class that day. The children make a fire in the stove before the bell rings. The teacher holds up a piece of paper with new and old names on it. He calls old names of students that are excused to go home and get their new registered names. The boy's name is called to report back as soon as possible. He goes home through the snow. His father waits at home, dressed in native Korean clothes and wearing a black armband worn to attend weddings or funerals. He takes the boy with him to meet his friends, dressed similarly and waiting at the west gate. They walk through town, where others join them to the police station across from the Methodist church. They stand in line with the boy, father, bookstore owner, doctor, farmer, elder of the church and a long line of others. The boy is freezing. The Japanese police Inspector insists father and the boy come ahead with him and not stand in line like a common person. The people in line bow to the boy's father. A Korean detective bows as they enter the building and says he didn't need to come in person. They are ushered to tables where Japanese police and Korean detectives assign Japanese names. The Chief of Police greets the boy's father. He gave his chosen family name "Iwamoto", which means "Foundation of Rock" from the Bible.

By twelve, all the boy's classmates have new names that they report to the Emperor at the shrine they attend at least once weekly. They kneel in snow with heads bowed as a priest reads their names and chants. Class is dismissed and the teacher brings the boy home to apologize. Grandfather, father and son go to the cemetery together. The cemetery is four miles out of town in the foothill of a mountain. Many people are there on their knees at the graves of their ancestors. Grandfather, father and son are on their knees, crying at the graves of their ancestors where they pour cups of wine over their

graves and drink a cup. Father and son bow again and leave grandfather to pray alone. The boy gets cold, hungry and begins to cry that he doesn't care about losing his name. Grandfather joins them and the three generations of their family bow to their ancestors and return home on February 11, 1940, the day they all lost their name.

An Empire for Rubber Balls

An Empire for Rubber Balls Summary and Analysis

The boy's mother has a "hectic morning routine" to prepare five breakfasts. Father eats early to go to the orchard before the boy and his second-grade sister eat. Grandparents eat next, followed by his three-year-old sister and new baby brother. Finally, mother and two young maids eat breakfast. The maids are teenage girls from peasant families that mother agreed with their mothers to feed, clothe and house. She teaches them and her second-grade daughter to read and write Korean. There is a war going on between Japan, America and allies and the boy performs in a war drama about the Imperial Crown Prince, who is his age. The boy, who is class leader, must wear a Japanese officer's uniform and give a long speech to celebrate the Crown Prince's birthday. The teacher who wrote the play is Japanese and makes the boy play the part to embarrass his father, according to his grandparents. The boy is ashamed to be in the play and the Chinese restaurant owner says it hurts his father, but mother insists he rehearse after school. He worries about his lines for the play at night.

After morning assembly, students are told to collect all the rubber balls they can find in their sector. A few months earlier they had received rubber balls to celebrate the Japanese capturing rubber-producing areas from Singapore and Malaya. The boy tells his mother they want them back but didn't know why. She says they need rubber. Grandmother says to put a hole in them to let air out so they'll fit in the sack they have rather than waste more sacks. Back at the assembly, class leaders have sacks, boxes and crates of rubber balls except for the boy. He has one sack full of deflated, saucer-shaped rubber balls. Teacher and Student of the Day inspect each class' rubber balls and dismiss them except the boy's class. He counts one hundred twenty-three flat balls out of the sack when the Teacher of the Day punches and slaps him. The teacher asks why he ruined all the balls and the boy says so they fit in the sack and "it was rubber, really, that we were to collect, not the balls, as you surely understand, sir." The boy thinks it was like other times when they collected things for the war like jewelry for the precious metal. He says, "I wouldn't think Japanese children would want to play with the rubber balls we have played with, would you sir?"

Teacher of the Day drags the boy to the teachers' lounge next to the principal's office. The principal is meeting with a police Inspector. He is told the boy had insulted the teacher and spoke "dangerous thoughts" in front of the class. The teacher dragsd the boy to the wall where he opens his pants to let them fall at his feet. The Inspector speaks in Korean to the boy ordering him to apologize. The teacher shouts to the Inspector, who tells him to shut up and that he is an officer of the Higher Police. The boy is hit several times with the bamboo till he refuses to take any more. He runs his head into the teacher's belly and punches his groin to make him double up. When he lunges at the boy again, the Inspector knocks him to the ground with the bamboo sword. The boy faints. He doesn't remember, but mother said she wouldn't forget her boy carried home bleeding, swollen and unconscious. The Inspector insists he tell his father what

he said to warn him. Father returns from the orchard to meet the Inspector and confirm his belief that the Japanese will lose the war within two years.

The Japanese teacher comes to the house to get the boy for the play. He is unable to perform, so the teacher asks the boy's friend to stand in for him. The boy's classmates come to see him as well as his grandmother, neighbors, relatives and the whole town. The boy insists on going to the church to see the performance despite or because he is bandaged. He has a hard time walking, so father sends a young tenant farmer to carry him. The young boy, all bandaged up, hid in the closet till his friend exchanges costumes with him so he can hobble out on stage to deliver the speech for "His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince's birthday." He begins speaking in Korean, then Japanese, but stops. Tears stream down his face as he becomes speechless and walks offstage. Mother says he wept for the wounded souls everywhere.

Is Someone Dying?

Is Someone Dying? Summary and Analysis

The school children who did not have blistered hands are ordered to work on an airfield runway they are digging four feet down in a ten by twenty foot section. The airfield is twenty miles north of town and would provide a refueling stop for Kamikaze planes from Manchuria to the mainland. The boy spends most of his junior high school's second year working on this airfield with four or five hundred other students. They barely complete one runway but never see any plane use or fly over it. The students live in tents by class with sixty in each plus a teacher. Tents are damp and smell of tar and grease with stale air and rotting straw mats that is nauseating. Students have diarrhea, dysentery and chronic indigestion. They get three meals daily of barley and soy-sauce soup with bean sprouts or curds floating in it. They can go home one day each week, but few do since travel is difficult and unreliable. In the evenings after work, they have class in the tent to read Japanese history. If they quit, they won't be readmitted anywhere in the country.

The boy's hands have oozing blisters, so he was put to work with eight others carrying gravel in a sack hung on a pole from a gravel pit outside the fenced area to the runway. They start work at seven-thirty, and by eleven the boy has made ten or twelve trips when the Japanese corporal tells him his mother is there to visit, which is unusual. The corporal gives the boy his canteen to fill and bring back when he is done. There is a large tent by the gate to meet visitors that has long tables and benches. His mother stands in the shade of the tent, wearing the required Japanese-style women's pants. She gives him apples, underwear and sheets to protect him from bedbugs. The boy asks why she came on an unusual day, but she says everyone is fine and father sent her to tell him about the war. She tells him Germany surrendered, the Russians attacked Japanese in Manchuria and Americans dropped bombs on Japan that destroyed two cities and landed on Okinawa four months ago. When he asks whether father wants him home, she gives the boy his signed notice of withdrawal. She says he must not tell the others why and gives him apples and cakes for his friends. The boy runs back to tell the teacher he is going home.

The Japanese teacher is in his tent smoking when the boy gives him the withdrawal notice. He is quiet and does not ask why, but reassures himself that he is indeed quitting when he signs the paper. The teacher acknowledges the war is going badly and baits the boy about Okinawa to find out what he knows. The boy slips, mentioning Manchuria, and the teacher acknowledged no planes will come to this airfield. The boy says he must meet his mother, who is waiting, and he gives him a three-day pass for an emergency. The teacher asks the boy to mention him to his father in case he needs help. He runs to meet his mother and shows his pass to the Japanese sentry at the gate, who asks if someone was dying. The boy nods and thinks to himself, "You and your Empire are dying." On the bus with his mother outside the gate, the boy is told his

grandfather was beaten and is now staying at the cottage and his father was taken to a detention camp four days ago.

In the Making of History - Together

In the Making of History - Together Summary and Analysis

Mid-August usually rains in the morning or afternoon every day, with a sudden downpour that just as quickly drifts away with a brilliant sizzling sun. This morning there is no rain, but a heavy mist hangs low over the earth. The boy's father is still at the detention camp that is thirty miles west of town. The Japanese Military Police and Thought Police have detained politically suspect Koreans. The boy remains in town with his grandparents so the doctor can see him while he recuperates from the dysentery and diarrhea he got at the labor camp. Mother and the other children are at the orchard. Grandfather asks him the time around noon while they wait for a radio newscast the police announced yesterday. The boy brings the radio out to the veranda so grandfather can hear it as he translates it from Japanese. Grandfather reads Korean, but there are no Korean newspapers since the Japanese banned them. The Japanese Emperor's voice says that Japan is surrendering unconditionally to the Allies. The boy cries out before grandmother and grandfather know what he said and they all break down crying when they realize what has happened. They fear the boy's father will be killed as the Emperor's radio voice drones on. The grandfather asks for a knife from the maid to cut a hole in the wall where he has hidden Korean flags that he takes out. He gives the boy a flag to fly on the pole after they cut the Japanese flag down to burn. They celebrate being free and independent. By afternoon, many people come and go looking for the boy's father while grandmother feeds them.

Streets and roads are filled with celebrating people as the whole town explodes with noise and happy crowds. The boy is dazed by celebrating people who ask about his father, so he returned home where grandfather drinks wine to celebrate with guests. The Japanese Shinto priest from next door calls father's name in Japanese and grandfather tells him to go away in Korean, but he doesn't understand. The priest begs their help since father is a Christian and would have helped him. He offers gold and the boy screams to put it away. Grandfather is angered by them but leaves it to his son's boy to help the priest and his wife or not. The boy tells a young farmer to get them to the air-raid shelter. The mob smashes into and destroys the priest's house to burn his things. They go to the police station where they think he may be hiding. The boy feels sad but doesn't know why.

By four o'clock, father has returned and is on his knees, reuniting with grandfather and grandmother. Earlier in the detention camp, father had organized 170 fellow Korean inmates with men outside the camp to mount a battle plan if the Japanese guards try to shoot them in camp. Father and others are called to the commandant's quarters where he ordera the Koreans released and the guards to Pyongyang. Dressed in kimono in front of everybody, he commits hari-kari after he orders his deputy to behead him. Father takes charge of the camp to complete surrender by freeing the inmates and

sending the guards to Pyongyang as the commandant ordered. The boy is proud of his father as he and grandfather get organized to "take the initiative away from the local Japanese." The boy tells his father about the Japanese priest and his wife he hid in the air-raid shelter for his sake. He says to feed them and hold them there till he gets back. Father and son ride off on their bicycles to the orchard. They pray together with mother and the other children. The boy asks whether father's not glad he is home to help him.

The sun sets over the mountain ridges behind the orchard as they see someone bicycling toward the orchard. The boy polishes the pistol he and father dug up from the orchard near an apple tree. Fourteen men have bicycled out, one by one, to the orchard that afternoon. They discuss how best to take over the police and other government offices. The boy thinks they are being too cautious and should isolate the police and others where they are by cutting telephone, water and electricity lines before surrounding them to surrender. They should look for weapons in Japanese houses with a big crowd and gather them together in the school auditorium or town theater. The boy makes the point they should organize the people first and quickly assign targets and battle groups before the people get confused or excited. Someone must take the lead. The doctor rides up on the bicycle and father is proud of the boy, saying, "He's been lecturing us on military tactics." The boy goes into the kitchen to talk to mother about the men wasting time. He reminds her he is thirteen now as he walked off eating a cucumber and carrying the pistol.

The men form a committee to meet later at their house in town. Father is the chairman of a committee for self-rule and public safety. They decide to take the railway station, government warehouses, buses and trucks, and occupy water and fire department, electric and government offices. The boy and his father pedal to town where they are greeted by many along the way. Father confides in his son that his generation let the country slip away by being too concerned with individual survival when they could have made the necessary reforms. They enter the house that is temporary headquarters, where several men remain outside watching for the police with hunting rifles and dynamite sticks. A message arrives from the chief of police, saying that he will surrender to the Russian occupation army. Later, another police messenger arrives to agree to turn over the station if police safety is guaranteed and weapons are turned over. The crowd marches over with torches waving and more people join as they proceed to the dark police station, where electricity has been cut off. When the men are deployed, the lights are turned back on according to plans. The chief of police comes out alone and removes his saber that he hands to father. Father turns to the crowd and announces, "I have also taken over all the public offices and facilities and the properties of the Japanese Empire in our town." He says quietly to his thirteen-year old son that it is his world now and that together they made history.

Characters

The boy

The boy is the narrator/author and most important character in the book. He is iconic to the extent he has no given name but referenced as "the boy" throughout. He represents any boy and all boys growing up in a transitional economic and political society during wartime. His life, name and experiences are generic and lived by any Korean boy of his age and time. The boy is often assumed the author and the work autobiographical despite his claim that it is "real" fiction. He first appears in the story as a one year old baby that his parents take across the Korean border to Manchuria. They left Korea so his parents could accept employment as Christian missionary teachers in Manchuria. The period of this story begins in 1932 and ends in 1945, when the boy is thirteen. All experiences during this time are told by the boy through his eyes. The boy's perceptions are presented through vignettes that represent certain points in his life. For example, he appears initially as a baby boy in the arms of his mother when his father is removed from the train that was to transport them across the border. He next appears as a second-grader who has returned from Manchuria and is back in Korea on his first day of school.

Through his eyes a story is told about the Japanese control of Korea and its impact on his life. For example, on his first day back in school, he sang "Danny Boy", as song that he learned from Christian missionaries in Manchuria. The song is interpreted by a Japanese teacher as foreign and "dangerous", reported by students he coerced to lie about the event. The teacher physically abuses the boy by hitting and slapping him until he is rescued by a native Korean teacher. The boy is a symbol of the hostility caused by conflict between Korean natives and Japanese occupiers. When the boy uses initiative to collect more rubber balls than any other class and prepare them for use as rubber by letting the air out, he is dragged to the principal's office where the Teacher of the Day beats him for the insult.

As the boy becomes a teenager, he represents generational economic differences. For example, his grandmother is proud to put white rice in his lunch as a sign of their accomplishments, but the boy is embarrassed because only rich boys get rice. His father was arrested for resisting, but the boy took action to change the old traditional and subservient Korea to a more aggressive and proactive Korea that took control of itself. For example, the boy encouraged his father to return the city to Korean control by surrounding the police station and taking over utilities.

Mother

Mother is another important and main character in the book. Essentially, her role is as mother of the boy who is the narrator/author provides his survival and growth. She carries the one-year-old baby boy in her arms when she is left alone on the train

because the Thought Police detective and Military Police force her husband and father of the child off the train to be interrogated at another location. Mother is the daughter of Christian missionaries who agreed to employ her husband as a science teacher at their missionary school in Manchuria. She will teach music there in a kindergarten. Mother and her parents are instrumental in the family's emigration from Korea to Manchuria. She married her husband after he was jailed as a resistance movement activist. Her trouble on the train was caused by his leaving Korea too soon after release from parole according to the authorities. She bravely stayed on the train to await his return until the train lurched forward on its apparent departure from the station. When it seemed he would not return in time to accompany her on the train, she boldly insisted to the conductor that she be allowed to get off and wait for him on the train platform, despite the cold winter weather. When her husband reappeared, she assumed her deferential role as they decide to walk across the frozen river rather than wait for another train.

The boy had completed first grade in the Manchurian missionary school when the family returned to Korea. Her husband is the oldest son and was traditionally expected to help his aging father at the family farm and orchard. She walked the boy part way to his first day at school and remained supportive but not intrusive or protective, despite his painful learning experiences. For example, he returned that day beaten and bloodied, so she cared for him in bed but woke him up when his friends came to visit. Mother asked if he wanted to go to another school but accepted his desire to be class leader there. When being class leader required he perform in a play, mother insisted he rehearse after school despite his shame to be in a play that the Chinese restaurant owner said hurt his father. Mother visited the boy with apples and cakes for his friends to tell him about the war and deliver his father's signed notice of withdrawal for release from the high school labor camp.

Mother had four children including the boy and his sister, another daughter and baby boy. She taught them Korean at home since it was not allowed in school and students were fined for speaking Korean. She also arranged to board and raise two teenage daughters as maids since their mothers could not afford them. On Sundays, mother attended a Presbyterian church where she played piano with the choir. When father expressed pride in the boy, he talks to mother about the men wasting time and reminds her he is thirteen now as he walks off eating a cucumber and carrying a pistol. Thirty years later, she reflects on her grown boy and remembers the many times they traveled over thin ice.

Father

Father is the name that refers to the father of the boy. He was released recently from parole after being jailed for resistance movement activities. Father and his wife, mother of the boy, were offered teaching jobs with Christian missionaries across the Korean border in Manchuria. The train was stopped at the last border town just before crossing the Tuman River into Manchuria. He was questioned by the Japanese Thought Police detective and Military Policeman and, despite his papers being in order, they detained

him anyway. Father dutifully returned to Korea after several years teaching with the Christian missionaries in Manchuria.

He is the oldest son in the family and by custom feels obligated to help his aging father with farming and the family apple orchard. The boy's father is well-known at home and used his influence with an assistant principal to have the boy tested for second grade. Grandfather, father and the boy celebrated his qualifying at dinner. Grandfather asked if he knew his father did things he would be proud of. At school he heard his father was a criminal from a boy whose face he smashed with his head and stomach he punched. Father said the "criminal" claim is that he was in prison while in college but did nothing he was ashamed of. Father dressed in native Korean clothes with a black armband that he wears to attend weddings or funerals. He and the boy accompanied his friends through town to the police station where they stood in line with many who bowed to father. A Japanese police Inspector insisted father and the boy come with him so as not to stand in line like a common person. A Korean detective bowed as they entered the building and said father didn't need to come in person. The Chief of Police greeted the boy's father. He gave his chosen family name "Iwamoto" meaning "Foundation of Rock" from the Bible to an Inspector. Later that day grandfather, father and son kneel, crying at the ancestors' gravesite. Three generations of the family bow to their ancestors February 11, 1940, the day they lost their name.

Father organized fellow Korean inmates in the detention camp with a battle plan if Japanese guards try to shoot them after the Emperor surrendered. Father was called to the commandant's quarters where he ordered the Koreans released and guards sent to Pyongyang before the commandant committed suicide. Father took charge of camp surrender by enforcing the commandant's orders. The boy was proud of his father as they organized to take initiative from the local Japanese. Father was proud of the boy, saying, "He's been lecturing us on military tactics." The boy said to organize people and assign targets and battle groups before they got confused or excited. Father chaired the committee for self-rule and public safety. They decided to take the railway station, government warehouses, buses, trucks and occupy water, fire, electric and other government offices. A message arrived from the chief of police that he would turn over the station if safety was guaranteed and weapons were turned over. The chief of police came out alone and removed his saber that he handed over to father. Father confided in his son that his generation let the country slip away by being too concerned with individual survival rather than making the necessary reforms. He said quietly to his thirteen-year-old son it is his world now that they made history together.

Grandmother

Grandmother is the name that refers to the boy's paternal grandmother. She believes her mission is feeding the family. Consequently, she gets up early on Sundays to fix a big breakfast for everybody. She serves soup, eggs, squash, beef, fish cucumber, eggplant, cabbage, rice and other food. When her daughter-in-law visited her parents to have a baby, grandmother took over fixing lunch for the boy and his sister. Grandmother wants her family to live better that she did which was why she and grandfather worked

hard to provide for them. She feels bad that they can afford rice, chicken and meat now, but can't have them since Japan took over. Consequently, grandmother takes pride in putting white rice in his lunch box. She doesn't know that the other boys tease him and take his lunch because it has white rice like rich boys get. He doesn't like white rice in his lunch because it makes him feel like he's showing off. Grandmother gave him a hot sweet potato to keep him warm on a cold day to school and to eat as a snack later.

Grandfather

Grandfather is the name that refers to the boy's paternal grandfather. The boy's father brings the family back to Korea to help his father with the farming and family orchard. The grandfather and father share a secret from the boy until he is older that makes the grandfather proud. Grandfather has dinner with his son and grandson on two occasions. On the first occasion, grandfather warned the boy Japanese will be mean to him but not to cry and he got no wine. On the second occasion, he received a cup of wine from grandfather that signified his pride and honor at his grandson becoming a man by defending his son's honor. On a third occasion, grandfather, father and son are on their knees, crying at their ancestors' gravesite, where they pour cups of wine over their graves and drink a cup. Father and son let grandfather pray alone. He joined them and three generations bowed to their ancestors and return home February 11, 1940, the day they lost their name.

Pumpkin

Pumpkin is the name of the bigger boy that follows the boy and his mother to school the first day. Pumpkin is the class "cut-up" by making "oink" sounds but later helps the boy when he defends himself against the Japanese teacher and tells him he should be class leader. Pumpkin leads a group of fourteen boys that come to congratulate and wish him well when he recuperates. Later that day Pumpkin drowns when he dove into the river and was found dead downstream. He is one of two characters that are identified by name rather than nationality, title or role.

Korean schoolteacher

Korean schoolteacher defends the new boy from the Japanese teacher who hits and abuses him. The Korean teacher has a black belt in martial arts and throws the Japanese teacher on the ground and against the wall. He becomes a hero to the boy and his friends but tells the grandfather he is leaving for Manchuria. He arrives in Manchuria but later travels to Mongolia where the Soviet soldiers claim he is a Japanese spy and kill him.

New Korean schoolteacher

New Korean schoolteacher tells the boy about the Non-aggression Pact by his new map that the boy helped him hang one Sunday. He is uncertain what that means, and since the boy and his father are going to the bookstore, the teacher says he's going too. At lunch, grandmother warns her son to be careful because the teacher was sneaky as a boy. At the bookstore, the boy's father, teacher and store owner talked quietly about events. The store owner warned the teacher, whose eyes tear up, to keep his wits about him.

Chopstick

Chopstick is the nickname of a Japanese teacher that told them they would have no class that day. Chopstick is the other one of two characters identified by name rather than nationality, title or role. Ironically, this named teacher was responsible for reviewing a list of new and old names. He called old names of those excused to go home and get their new registered names.

Teacher of the Day

Teacher of the Day inspected each class' rubber balls and let the class leave the field except for the boy's class. He counted 123 flat balls out of the sack when the teacher punched and slapped him. He asked why the teacher hit him when his class collected more balls than other classes. When asked why he ruined all the balls, the boy said they wouldn't all fit in one sack, and "it was rubber, really, that we were to collect, not the balls, as you surely understand, sir." The teacher dragged the boy to the principal's office and against the wall where he opens his pants to let them fall at his feet. The boy is hit several times with the bamboo until he refused to take any more. He ran his head into the teacher's belly and punched his groin to make him double up.

Police Inspector

Police Inspector spoke in Korean to the boy, ordering him to apologize. The Teacher of the Day shouted to the Inspector, who told him to shut up since he was an officer of the Higher Police. As he got up to lunge at the boy, the Inspector knocked the teacher to the ground with the bamboo sword. The Inspector took the boy home and insisted on talking to his father to warn him.

Japanese teacher in charge of the play

The Japanese teacher in charge of the play came to the house to get the boy for the play. He was in no condition to perform, so the teacher asked the boy's friend to stand in for him and the teacher would hold up cue cards for him to read the speech. Ironically,

the venue changed to one where the teacher must stand up to hold cue cards, which would be obvious to the audience.

Japanese teacher at the labor camp

The Japanese teacher at the labor camp was in his tent smoking when the boy gives him the withdrawal notice. He was quiet and did not ask why, but confirmed that he was quitting when he signed the paper. The teacher acknowledged the war was going badly and asked the boy about Okinawa to find out what he knows. The boy spent most of his junior high school's second year working on this airfield with four or five hundred other students that lived in tents by class with sixty in each, plus a teacher. The teacher admitted no planes would ever land there.

Commandant

Commandant is the name of the officer in charge of the detention camp that jailed the boy's father at the end of the war. The commandant turned over the camp to Koreans and sent Japanese guards back to Pyongyang when he heard the Japanese Emperor surrendered. Dressed in a kimono in front of everybody, he committed hari-kari with a ceremonial knife after ordering a deputy to behead him.

Chief of Police

Chief of Police is the name of the officer in charge of the city. He greeted the boy's father on the day the Japanese registered their new names. The boy's father gave an Inspector his chosen family name "Iwamoto", which means "Foundation of Rock" from the Bible. The boy's father was chairman of the Committee to take over the city. Father negotiated with him and accepted surrender from the Chief of Police, who officially turned over the city to the Korean residents by handing over his saber to the chairman and boy's father.

Objects/Places

Train

Train refers to the form of long-distance transportation the family used. The mother, baby boy and father had been traveling all day by train that stopped at the border town railroad station before crossing a bridge over the Tuman River to Manchuria.

Tuman River

Tuman River is the name of the river that they must cross to reach Manchuria. They initially plan to cross the river by train, but eventually walk across the frozen river rather than risking a long delay for another train to take them across.

Railroad station

Railroad station refers to the location at the border town from northern Korea to Manchuria where mother, father and baby boy warm themselves before crossing the frozen river.

Foreign missionaries

Foreign missionaries refer to the high school that has agreed to hire the father to teach biology and chemistry in Manchuria.

Korean ghetto

Korean ghetto refers to the town populated primarily by Koreans and surrounded by Chinese that the family travels to in Manchuria to live.

Thin ice

Thin ice is the term that refers actually to the areas of thin ice on the Tuman River caused by ice fishing holes. The term is also used symbolically in reference to the many situations mother reflected on that they have endured and been dangerous to the now grown boy since they crossed the river's thin ice thirty years ago.

Cup of wine

Cup of wine is a term that refers to a ceremonial and functional vessel grandfather used to celebrate dinner with his family and friends. Cups of wine are also used to toast the

ancestors at their gravesite and as a show of appreciation and respect for something. For example, grandfather gave the boy a cup of wine when he defended his father's honor.

Assembly formation

Assembly formation refers to the daily routine in which the students line up in classes for inspection by Student and Teacher of the Day. During this assembly, students are required to turn east and bow to the Emperor's palace in Tokyo.

Danny Boy

Danny Boy is the name of an American song that the boy is required to sing on his first day of school. It is the only song he knows. Since it is in English, he is accused of singing a foreign song by a tall, mustachioed Japanese teacher who slaps and screams at him.

Four cakes

Four cakes refers to the four cakes a Chinese restaurant owner gave the boy to take home after he is beaten by the Japanese teacher for singing a foreign song and brought home by the Korean teacher who rescued him. The boy wants to give them to Pumpkin and mother offers to save and warm them for him when he returns from swimming. The boy asks later whether Pumpkin came by to eat them. Mother told him Pumpkin drowned while swimming and is dead.

Chicken and hot meat dumplings

Chicken and hot meat dumplings refer to dinner ingredients that are reserved for special occasions. Grandfather served them to father and the boy because he is proud the boy stood up for his father when the Japanese teacher called him a criminal.

New Life Apple Orchard

New Life Apple Orchard is the name of the family orchard where they have a little cottage that the family stays in for the summer. Inside the gate there are chicken coops, pigsty, and separate building for cows and oxen.

Bicycle

Bicycle refers to the vehicle typically used by father and son to get around. The boy received his bicycle from three maternal uncles when he entered third grade and became class leader.

German-Russian Mutual Non-aggression Treaty

German-Russian Mutual Non-aggression Treaty, August 23, 1939 is the name that refers to a label on the teacher's new world map when he replaced the old map. The label was listed by a green line from Russia to Germany and was the only difference between the old and new maps. The boy's Korean teacher did not know what it meant and discussed it with the boy's father at the bookstore.

Dangerous conversation

Dangerous conversation is the term that refers to any conversation that could get the participants in trouble with the Thought Police or other government bodies. For example, the bookstore owner, father and the Korean teacher have dangerous conversation about the non-aggression treaty in the bookstore one Sunday.

Thought Police

Thought Police is a term that refers to the Japanese police force that was charged with watching out for any "dangerous" activity or conversation that could get the participants in trouble with the Thought Police or other government bodies.

Oxcart

Oxcart is the name of a vehicle pulled by oxen and driven by oxcart driver that the family used for local transport when mother and children travel. Father and the boy typically rode their bicycles when they traveled.

Iwamoto

Iwamoto is the name that the father chose to give an Inspector to register as their new family name. The name means "Foundation of Rock" from the Bible.

Ancestral gravesite

Ancestral gravesite is the name of the location where the three generations of the family spend the afternoon on the day they all lost their name.

War drama

War drama is the name that refers to a play the boy rehearses about the Japanese Imperial Crown Prince who is his age. There is a war going on between Japan and America and their allies. The boy is required to dress in a Japanese officer's uniform and must give a long speech to celebrate the Crown Prince's birthday. He was selected for the part because he is the class leader according to his teacher. The boy was beat up by another teacher and was unable to perform.

Rubber balls

Rubber balls refer to the items collected by the boy's class. A few months earlier they received rubber balls to celebrate the Japanese capturing rubber-producing areas from Singapore and Malaya. The boy told his mother they want them back but he doesn't know why. She said they must need rubber and grandmother said they will use fewer sacks by puncturing the rubber balls so they are flat. The boy gets in trouble with a Japanese Teacher of the Day despite collecting more balls than any other class. The rubber balls were for Japanese children to play with, but the boy's logical assumption that they need rubber for the war was misunderstood by the teacher as an insult.

Student labor camp

Student labor camp is the term that refers to the camps established for the high school students to dig an airfield runway twenty miles north of town. The airfield would provide a refueling stop for Kamikaze planes flying from Manchuria to the mainland. The runway was dug four feet down in a ten by twenty foot section by each class. The students were housed in tents by class with sixty in each plus a teacher. Camp tents are damp and smell of tar and grease with stale air and rotting straw mats that nauseate. Students develop diarrhea, dysentery and chronic indigestion under these conditions. They are fed three meals daily of barley and soy-sauce soup with bean sprouts or curds floating in it.

Signed notice of withdrawal

Signed notice of withdrawal is the term used to describe the approval form father signed for his son to quit high school so he could leave the labor camp. The boy's mother gave him the notice only after the boy indicated he wants to leave. The boy took the notice back to his Japanese teacher who signed approval as well and gave the boy a three day emergency leave so the guard will let him pass.

Japanese surrender

Japanese surrender is the term that refers to the announcement by the Emperor of Japan that Japan surrenders unconditionally to the Allies. Grandfather and the boy hear the announcement by radio and many celebrating people come to visit. The boy's father is in a detention camp when the announcement is made and they fear he and the other Korean inmates will be killed.

Japanese Empire and its properties

Japanese Empire and its properties is the term that refers to all of the properties in the city under control of the occupying Japanese. When Japan surrendered the properties are taken back by the Korean citizens. Properties include the public utilities, government offices and other properties.

Hari-kari

Hari-kari is the term used to describe ritual suicide committed by the commandant in charge of the detained Korean prisoners. He ordered his assistant to behead him after he stabbed himself with the ceremonial hari-kari knife.

Saber

Saber is a term that refers to the symbolic sword the chief of police turned over to father as evidence of his surrender of control to the committee that father chairs.

Themes

Names don't matter

This work is particularly unusual to the extent that only relatively minor characters have proper names. The main character begins in the story as an unknown year-old baby boy. His father was a resistance movement leader who was imprisoned, recently released and just freed from parole. He and his young wife flee Korea for Manchuria in the dead of winter. They are both Christian emigrants known by friends, family and associates that have no name at the beginning of the story. Ironically, these Koreans fleeing Japanese domination and occupation were named by the Japanese when the father registered his new family name as "Iwamoto." Paradoxically, on that day grandfather, father and son visit their ancestors' gravesite to apologize for losing the name that remained unstated.

The reader knows these characters by their familial role relationships. Specifically, there is a nuclear family comprised of father and mother with three children; the boy, his sister, a younger sister and baby brother. In addition, there is an extended family comprised of the paternal grandfather and grandmother, maternal grandparents and both maternal and paternal uncles. The paternal family homestead, farm and orchard includes two young maids hired and taught for room and board by the mother, various aged tenant farmers whose families were helped and protected by the family patriarch. Beyond the present time family, ancestors are recognized in ritual celebration. The family name selected by the father and registered by Japanese occupiers replaced the earth-bound ancestral name with its biblical origin in which the name "Iwamoto" means "Foundation of Rock."

Ironically, characters of lesser significance than the family members have names. For example, the bigger boy who follows the boy and his mother to school on that first day is Pumpkin. He is the leader of his school friends and says the boy should become class leader. Pumpkin drowned in the river. The new boy was embarrassed when he had to sing a song and picked "Danny Boy" in English, which was the only one he knew. He was accused of singing a foreign song that was dangerous. On another day the Japanese teacher nicknamed "Chopstick" told them they would have no class that day. Chopstick held up a piece of paper with the old names of students he sent home to get new names. Three generations of the boy's family bowed in sorrow to their ancestors because on that day they all lost their name.

Euphemistic titles

Several euphemistic titles are used in the book to describe unpleasant duties that denote social elements of the Japanese occupied control of Korean society. For example, the Japanese Thought Police detective entered the train to ask the father for his papers. In spite of the facts that his papers are in order and he had authorization to

leave the country, he was detained for questioning. The reason for delay was the stated "thought-based" offense that he wasted no time getting out of the country since his release from parole. Despite his status as a Korean citizen, the Japanese Military Policeman accompanied the Thought Police to take him off the train for questioning by the military police. Thought Police was a socially acceptable term to describe their job to spy on "dangerous" activity or conversation that could get the participants in trouble with them or other government bodies. Thought Police were really citizen spies for the military police. For example, the father, bookstore owner and teacher discussed "non-aggression treaty" and the bookstore owner warned the teacher to stay watchful after their "dangerous" conversation.

Similarly, in school, classes began for the boy with daily assembly in the field where the students lined up for inspection by the Student of the Day and the Teacher of the Day. Each class had a class leader to whom class members were responsible. Class leaders reported to the Student of the Day who took care of unusual events. For example, on the boy's first day, the Student of the Day greeted him and took him to a class leader from second grade that he told to "Look after him." Students assembled in formation and each class leader reported to the Student of the Day, who in turn reported to the Teacher of the Day. If everything was in order, the command "At ease" was shouted. Before breaking up from assembly and going to class, the students honored the Emperor of Japan when they turned east and bowed to the Japanese Emperor's palace in Tokyo. Often a Teacher of the Day took action on his own authority. For example, the boy's class collected more rubber balls than any other class. The boy deflated them to fit in one sack. A Teacher of the Day dragged the boy to the teachers' lounge, where he whipped him with a bamboo stick for what he called an insult. The Teacher of the Day shouted at a Police Inspector who was also there but told him to shut up because he was an officer of the Higher Police.

When the students were talking one day, another new boy said his brother planned to be a monk but the army made him a "Special Volunteer Soldier" that forced him to fight with Japanese soldiers. He was euphemistically called special volunteer and soldier because he never volunteered and didn't want to be a soldier. Another euphemism of Japanese occupation required the Koreans who live on the Asian continent or mainland call Japan, which is an island, the "mainland", where they must send their white rice, meat and fowl. Students were required to stay in student labor camps outside of town doing useless jobs. For example, the boy spent his junior high school's second year building an airfield with four or five hundred other students. They completed one runway but never saw any plane use or fly over it. Finally, when the boy withdrew from high school and labor camp, the teacher said no planes will land on the runway. Even the detention camp commandant's ceremonial suicide called hari-kari was euphemistic because he ordered his assistant to behead him with a saber after he used the ritual hari-kari knife.

Timeline of the venture

This story took place just before World War II, which began in 1939. Previously, by 1910, Japan had annexed Korea according to classroom slogans the boy saw. The family's fateful trek across the frozen Tuman River from Korea into Manchuria occurred in 1933. By then the married Korean couple had a one-year-old baby boy. The husband had already been in jail for his resistance-movement activities and had served out his required period of parole after imprisonment. These activities and his imprisonment happened before the couple met and married. The boy is a one-year-old, so the couple presumably wed two years earlier, or about 1930. Japan annexed Korea in 1910 so the husband's resistance activities that got him jailed before they met must have occurred after 1910 when he was in college and before 1930. The boy was born in 1932 Korea and they left for Manchuria in 1933. They returned to Korea in 1938.

World conditions at this time were in a state of change with rulers in Japan, Germany and Italy taking offensive action against their own governments and other nations. Japan had forcibly annexed Korea in 1910. Around 1930 the couple met, married and became parents in 1932, while he was still on parole. His responsibilities with a wife and son made him leave Japanese-occupied Korea in 1933 for a teaching job offer in Manchuria a week after completing parole. They lived and taught in a Korean ghetto town surrounded by Chinese in Manchuria. Ironically, Japan's Imperial Army took over Manchuria in 1934 and China in 1937. In Italy, Mussolini was in power and in Germany Hitler and the Nazis were in control. In 1935, Italy's Fascist armies invaded Ethiopia and the next year annexed Ethiopia. In that same year, Japan, Germany, and Italy formed an alliance called the Axis powers.

By 1938, the father felt his responsibility as eldest son to care for his parents still in Korea. In addition, Manchuria was no longer a haven from the Japanese since they took it over in 1934 and invaded China in 1937. He took his family back to Korea in 1938. In that year, Germany annexed Austria and the Japanese and Soviet troops fought on the Manchurian-Siberian border. In 1939, World War II began with Japan, Germany and Italy allied against England, France, Russia and other nations except for Russia and Germany's "German-Russian Mutual Non-aggression Treaty." By his second year in high school, the boy's mother visited him in the labor camp to tell him that Germany surrendered, the Russians attacked the Japanese in Manchuria and Americans dropped bombs on Japan that destroyed two cities. At home, with his grandparents, the boy translated the Japanese Emperor's radio voice as it surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. Father was voted chairman of a committee for self-rule and public safety to take over the railway station, warehouses, buses, trucks, water, electric and fire departments and government offices. The chief of police came out alone to remove his saber and hand it over to the committee chairman. Father turned to the crowd and said, "I have also taken over all the public offices and facilities and the properties of the Japanese Empire in our town." Father said quietly to his thirteen-year-old son that it is his world now that they made history together.

Style

Perspective

Richard E. Kim, the author of Lost Names, was born in Hamheung, North Korea in 1932. Kim entered the United States in 1955, after he served from 1950-1954 in the Republic of Korea Marines and Army. He is a naturalized U.S. citizen who attended several American universities from 1955 to 1963. He earned a masters degree in writing at Johns Hopkins University and a masters in Far Eastern languages and literature from Harvard University in 1963. He was Fulbright professor at Seoul National University in 1981-83. He wrote fourteen published original works in both English and Korean from 1964 to 1984 and received awards from the Ford Foundation, Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts Literary Fellowship among others.

Kim was born in Korea in 1932 and lived there through the time period of the book 1945, and beyond to 1955. He grew up in Korea as a boy like one in Lost Names. Although the work is not strictly autobiographical, according to the author, most readers accept "that the young boy, the first-person narrator, is the author himself." Kim wrote a series of seven fictional tales about a Korean boy that are perceived and classified ironically as a non-fictional account of his life. Kim claims autobiography is neither pure non-fiction nor is fiction pure fiction. He leaves it up to the reader to evaluate Lost Names as whatever they would like it to be since, he writes, it was written for them.

Tone

This book is written in a subjective tone in which the author recalls his impression of events in retrospect from the point of view of a young boy growing up during the time of the Second World War. The story begins with a baby boy in the arms of his parents as they leave the repressive Japanese occupation of Korea. One sees the boy grow, mature and develop into a thirteen-year-old through his own eyes from 1932 to 1945. The reader is immediately brought into the family circle where he or she becomes sympathetic to the boy and his nuclear and extended family fate. The simple straightforward language of Lost Names makes the work easily understood by a reader. Richard E. Kim presents a reality readily appreciated even beyond the tragic environment of a world at war.

Structure

Lost Names is a 198 page quasi non-fiction book written by Richard E. Kim. This book is comprised of seven unnumbered but titled chapters ranging in size from seventeen to thirty-seven pages. Each chapter presents a vignette, or short literary sketch or description, of an event in the boy's life. Each episode reflects upon a significant experience in the boy's growth from infancy to teenage. Content of the book is followed by an Author's Note to clarify the genre in which it is written and perceived. The

language used is simple, as can be expected with a young Korean boy, but elegant and neither puerile nor trite. Each word or phrase is packed with the content a young boy might feel. For example, on the day they lost their names he walks home in snow thinking over, "my new name, my old name, my true name, my not-true name?" The child finally says, "I am going to lose my name; I am going to lose my name; we are all going to lose our names."

Each chapter title expresses the content of the chapter so the reader is forewarned about what can be expected. For example, the opening chapter discussing the trek from Korea into Manchuria is titled "Crossing." The episode dealing with their name change from Korean to Japanese is succinctly titled "Lost Names." Chapter episodes skip over less significant intervening years. The vignettes track from the border crossing to their return years later called homecoming, followed by a salient event about "non-aggression" on a Sunday afternoon, to loss of the ancestral name at the gravesite, rubber balls, death of an empire and making history to restore Korean independence. Except for minor characters, the important people in the story have no names but the generic familial identifying roles like father, mother and grandmother. This literary peculiarity ironically enhances their significance by universalizing them to all Koreans and perhaps beyond to any race of people disenfranchised by an occupying force. Paradoxically, this depersonalization of main characters makes them more endearing. The poignancy of having no given name is made more devastating by the loss of their ancestral family name as well. After all, this personal destruction is the goal of an occupying race. Only the father's wise choice of Iwamoto anchored the ancestral family's "Foundation of Rock" to start anew.

Quotes

"'I want to go across the river,' says my mother, wrapping me up with the blankets. 'We have someone waiting for us across the river,' says my father. 'Thank you for everything,'"
p. 15

"As I sit looking at these slogans, the Invincible Imperial Forces are battering the Chinese, having conquered most of the heartland of China. In Italy, the Fascist Mussolini has been in power for years now, and, in Germany, Hitler and his Nazis are firmly in control. Three years ago, in 1935, Mussolini's Fascist armies conquered Ethiopia, and, the next year, Ethiopia was 'annexed' by Italy, just as my country was 'annexed' by Japan, by force, in 1910. Japan's Imperial Army gobbled up Manchuria in 1934 and invaded China proper in 1937. The same year, Japan, Germany, and Italy formed the so-called Axis powers - all set to carve up the world. In 1938, the year I am starting at the new school, Germany annexes Austria; and, in July of this same year, the Japanese troops and the Soviet troops are fighting along the Manchurian-Siberian border."
pp. 31-32

"What is going on in the world? Even my father does not know. We do not know what is happening in the world or why, except that there is a war going on between the Japanese and the Chinese and there is another war going on in Europe among all the powers - and Americans are watching, sitting safely in that big white blank on our map, between the Pacific and the Atlantic. . ."
p. 77

"'Today,' he says, without looking at us, holding up the piece of paper in front of him, 'I must have your names. I have the new names of most of you in this class, but the principal tells me that some of you have not yet registered your names. I shall call your old names, and those who are called will be excused from the class immediately, so that they can go home and return with their new names, which have been properly registered with the proper authorities in town. Do you understand what I am saying?'"
p. 99

"I go on, half being carried away and half knowing that there is now no turning back. 'It never occurred to me that we were to collect rubber balls as such, sir, for other children to play with them, for example, sir. Like Japanese children on the mainland, sir. But then, sir, I wouldn't think Japanese children would want to play with the rubber balls we have played with, would you, sir?'"
p. 129

"Along with my classmates, I shoveled all day, digging up rubbery red clay, to a depth of four feet, barely clearing a ten- by twenty-foot sector, which was our class's quota for the day. We are building an airfield about thirty miles south of Pyongyang - or about twenty miles north of our town. The airfield, we are told, will have two runways and will

serve as a refueling station for the Kamikaze planes that are being flown from Manchuria to the mainland."
p. 143

"I look up. In the bright moonlight that bathes his face, I see tears shining in his eyes. I grip his hand and I, too, am trembling. I can't control the violent shaking. There is a light tap on my shoulder, and my father, looking into my eyes, says, 'It's all right. It's over.' Without a word, I nod my head, feeling the tremor within me subsiding. He says quietly, 'It is your world now.' I put my arm around him."
p. 195

Topics for Discussion

Identify and describe the situation that the young mother and her child face as a result of her husband's experiences before they married. Do you think she was wise in marrying him? If so, explain why or if not suggest a different choice.

Explain and discuss the significance of world conditions at the time of the family's return to Korea from Manchuria. How does the conflict and conquest by Japanese affect the boy's school day and homecoming?

Identify, list and describe at least three countries on each side that were aligned with Japan at the beginning of the non-aggression pact in 1939. Describe how the situation changed as represented by the Korean schoolteachers old and new world maps.

Identify, describe and discuss the name that the father chose for their family. How is it significant to them and their future in Korea?

Identify, describe and discuss the situation that developed with the boy collecting rubber balls that caused the Teacher of the Day to react violently to his successful effort at collecting over one hundred twenty balls. Discuss whether you think the Teacher was justified in getting angry at the boy and explain why or why not.

Describe and discuss the project that was required for the children to work and study twenty miles from town. How would this situation be treated under current American laws of child labor? Discuss whether this is an appropriate use of children during wartime and explain why or why not.

Identify, describe and discuss the steps taken by the Committee for self-rule and public safety to take over local control of the city after the Japanese Emperor had surrendered.