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Sat, Apr 23, 2022 at 10:02 AM



Middle Grade Historical Fiction

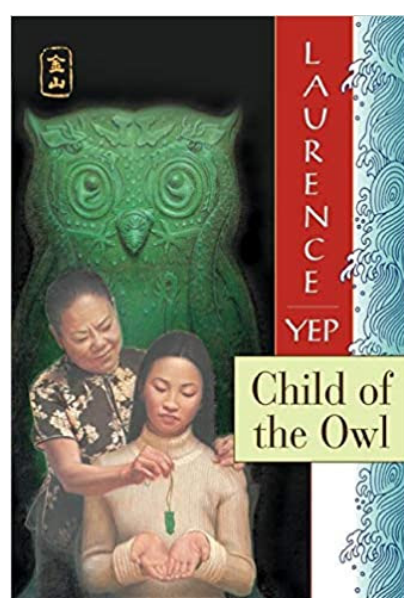
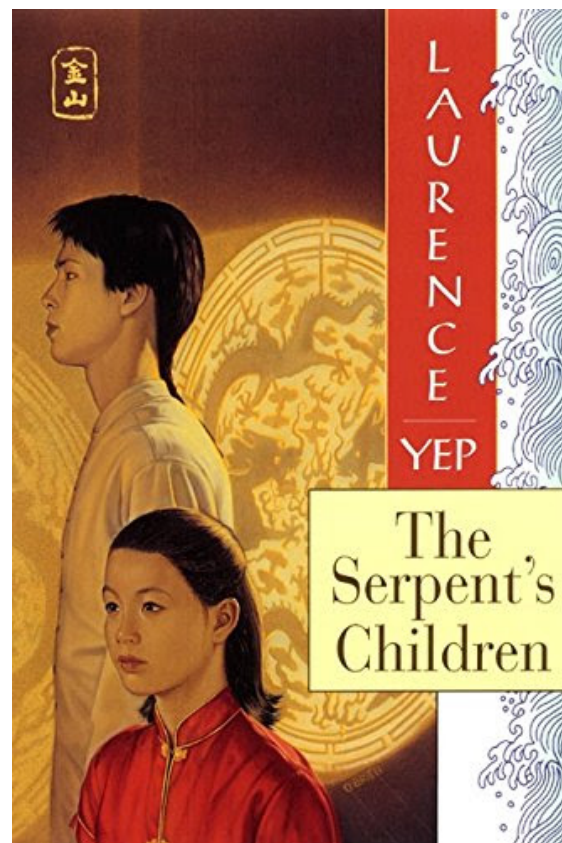
The Asian-American Experience

Integrating historical fiction into a history unit is one way to resurrect the past in vivid detail. An engaging story with relatable characters can bring history to life in visceral ways that the dry and detached writing in so many textbooks cannot. Fortunately, there are many novelists to choose from, whose work spans a wide range of historical periods. Below are three of our top picks.

Laurence Yep

High on any list of excellent examples of Asian-American historical fiction are *The Golden Mountain Chronicles*, a series of novels by Newbery Honor-winning author, Laurence Yep. This series follows the members of the extended Young family who leave China in 1849 to start a new life in America. In stunning and accessible prose, Yep weaves themes of Chinese mythology throughout the series and stages each novel at a pivotal moment in history.

The Serpent's Children is set during the California Gold Rush and *Dragon's Gate* explores the oppressive conditions Chinese workers endured as they dug tunnels and laid track for the transcontinental railroad.

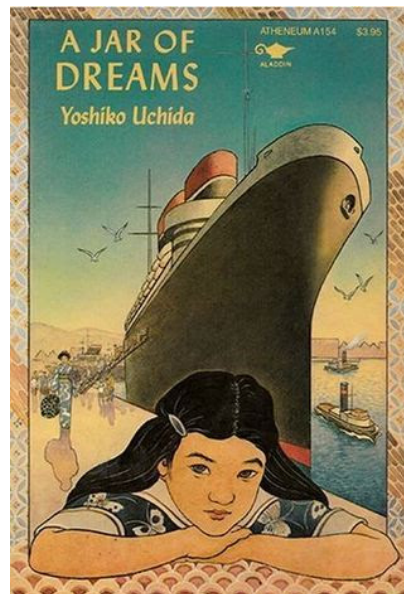
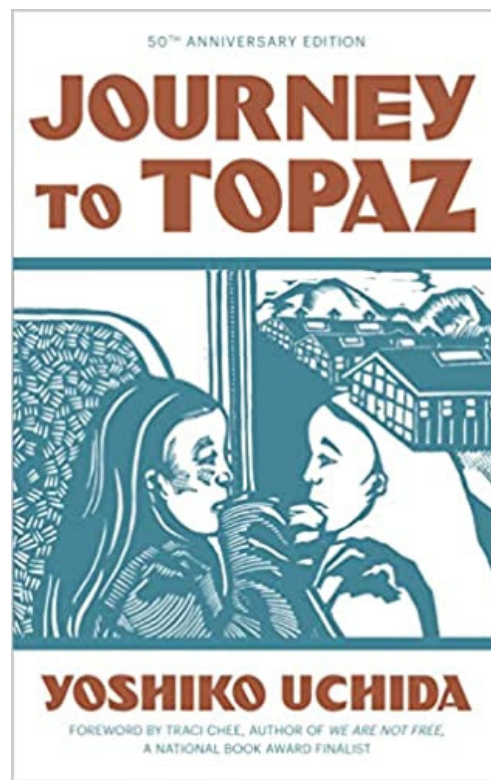


In *The Earth Dragon Awaits*, characters struggle to rebuild Chinatown after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire reduced the neighborhood to rubble.

Child of the Owl, set in San Francisco of the late 1960s, follows twelve year-old Casey as she leaves her loving but gambling-addicted father and moves into her grandmother's crowded Chinatown apartment where she feels torn between cultures.

Yoshiko Uchida

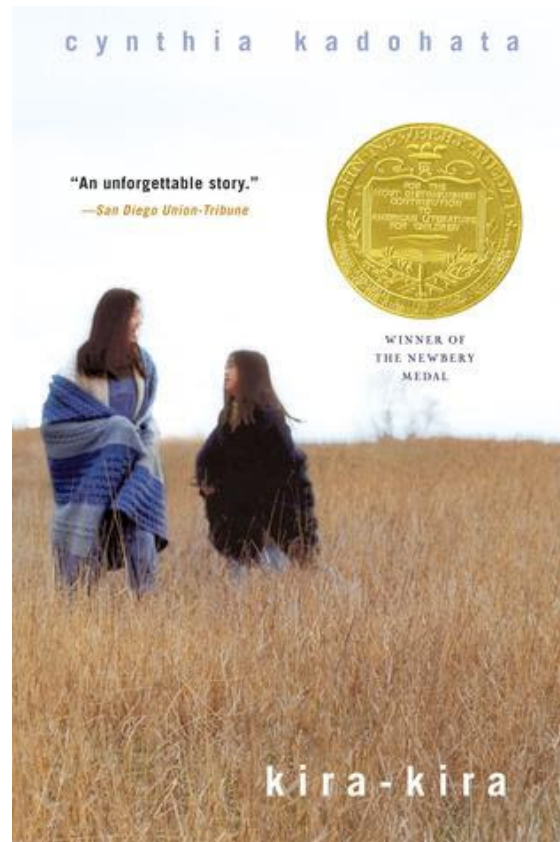
In writing punctuated with crisp imagery and haunting similes, Yoshiko Uchida's autobiographical novel, *Journey to Topaz*, chronicles the experience of a Japanese-American family living in Berkeley, California during World War II. Along with thousands of other West Coast Japanese, the Sakanes are rounded up, labeled "enemy aliens," and interned behind barbed wire in a desolate region of Utah for the duration of the war.



In Uchida's trilogy, *A Jar of Dreams*, *The Best Bad Thing*, and *The Happiest Ending*, we witness 11 year-old Rinko and her family as they struggle to make ends meet in Depression-era Oakland, California. This series is especially suitable for use in local history units on the San Francisco Bay Area, as key landmarks, streets, and even trolley lines are mentioned. The area's rural beginnings might surprise young readers who know Oakland as a dense urban grid.

Cynthia Kadohata

Winner of the 2005 Newbery Medal, the novel *Kira-Kira* by Cynthia Kadohata tells the story of the Takeshima family, who relocate from Iowa to Georgia in the early 1960s to work in the state's chicken hatcheries, where jobs are available for Japanese workers but conditions are often brutal. Narrated with honesty and humor by the family's younger sister, Katie, the book explores the racism and poverty of a volatile time in U.S. history from a Japanese-American perspective. The novel's title, *Kira-Kira*, means "glittering" in Japanese, a word Katie's older sister, Lynn, uses to describe things as mundane as Kleenex. From her older sister, Katie learns to see the world as a place full of beauty and glittering possibility, despite her family's hardships, chief among them, Lynn's own terminal illness.



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