

# • Meet the Author •

## Linda Sue Park



Linda Sue Park is the Newbery Medal-winning author of *A Single Shard* and several other middle-grade novels, the most recent of which is *Archer's Quest*. She has also written several picture books. Awards for her work include the Jane Addams Honor citation for *When My Name Was Keoko*; the Chicago Tribune Young Adult Fiction Award for *Project Mulberry*; and the James and Irma Black Honor (Bank Street book award) for *The Firekeeper's Son*. Ms. Park lives with her family in Rochester, New York.

**Your story makes me hungry! I can just smell the steamy rice, the frying eggs, onions, and meat as I read. What is your personal connection to bee-bim bop? Any stories to tell?**

**LSP:** I don't know any Koreans or Korean-Americans who don't love *bee-bim bop*! My mom made

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).

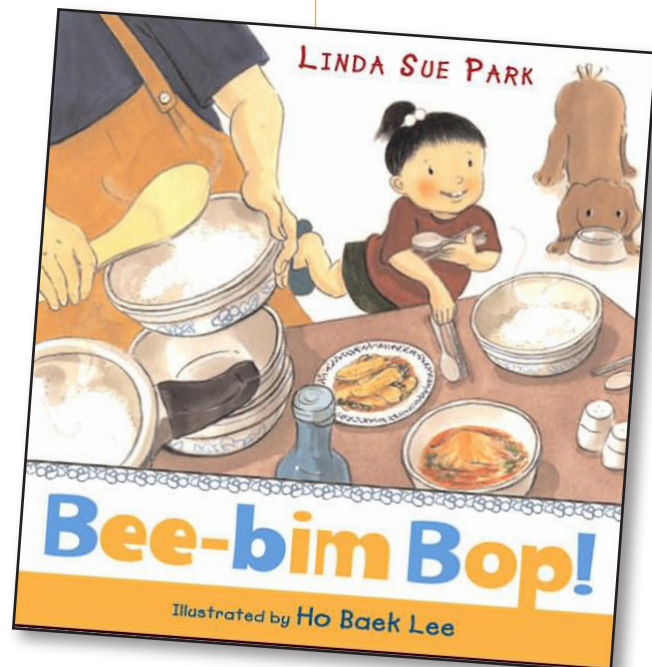
it often when I was growing up; it was on the menu at every Korean celebration or gathering my family ever went to; and I make it for my own family now.

**As we read *Bee-Bim Bop!* it's easy (and entirely incorrect, I'm sure) to imagine that this lively verse hopped right off of your pen in its free and easy form. Will you please talk about the writing of this rhymed verse and any struggles you may have had with form or language?**

**LSP:** It started with the sound of the word itself—it's always seemed to me like such a fun word to say. The first verse did come to me pretty easily ... and

when I went on to the second, I realized right away that I was going to have a problem: I'd have to find a whole bunch of words to rhyme with "bop"! But I found it a fun and interesting challenge. I wrote and discarded many verses before I settled on those that made the final cut.

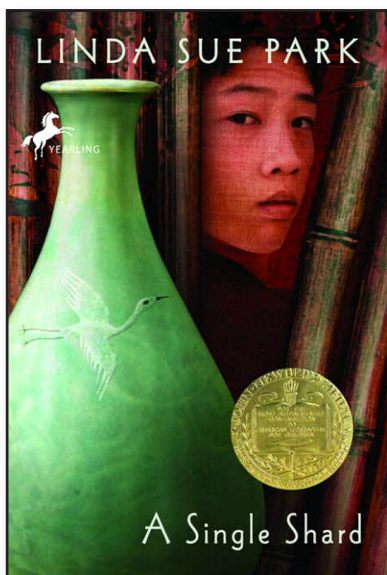
In terms of language: Just a few years ago, the Korean government officially standardized the romanization of the Korean alphabet; up until then, there was a difficult academic system (McCune-Reischauer), or else people just sort of "winged it." Now the approved spelling in English is "bibim bap." But when I tested that spelling on dozens of native English speakers, their pronunciation was invariably incorrect. I opted for a more



phonetic spelling, which gets readers closer to the Korean pronunciation. It was not an easy decision to make—because it looks “wrong” if you know the new official spelling—but those are the kinds of choices you sometimes have to make when you’re writing multiculturally.

**Having won the Newbery Award for *A Single Shard* and having published a strong collection of other novels as well, you are best known for your longer works of fiction. More recently, though, you’ve stepped into the picture book world as well. What attracts you to the picture book form and what, in particular, do you like about it?**

**LSP:** Two things: I like the change of pace work-wise, and I love picture books. I have such admiration for picture books as both an art form and a child’s first step into the book world. I consider myself very fortunate to be able to write both novels and picture books.



**The main character in your story is such a high-energy child, so eager, so enthusiastic, so HUNGRY! Who was your model for her? Were you a child like her when you were young? If not, what were you like?**

**LSP:** Food is such a huge thing in a young child’s life, tangled up with need and pleasure and parents and control and a million other issues. So, on the one hand it’s a true universal. On the other hand, in my specific case, my family was and is crazy about food. My mom and dad are both great cooks, and I grew up understanding that good food has the power to bring people together.

**It is interesting that your illustrator is Korean. Might you share any information about the selection of an illustrator or the process of working with him and your editor on this book.**

**LSP:** Ho Baek Lee had published one picture book here in the U.S., called *While We Were Out*. It’s delightful—about the adventures of a rabbit when his human owners go out for the day. On the strength of that book, Clarion signed him to illustrate the text for *Bee-bim*, and then just a couple weeks later, *While We Were Out* was named a New York Times best illustrated book of the year!

There was one point over which we had some discussion via e-mails through the editor. He was confused about the egg verse.

With most recipes for *bee-bim bop*, you fry one egg per person as a final garnish for the dish, and this is what Mr. Lee is accustomed to. But my mom has always made a flat omelet instead, and cut the omelet into little strips to mix in with everything else. My theory is that the omelet method came into use during hard times, when Korean families might well have found it difficult to obtain one egg per person; the way my mom does it, you can stretch a couple of eggs much further. Once this was explained to Mr. Lee, he understood and drew the omelet instead of fried eggs!

**How can readers learn more about you and your books?**

**LSP:** My Web site: [www.lindasuepark.com](http://www.lindasuepark.com). There’s lots of information about me and my books, and about reading and writing, as well as my schedule of appearances. I also keep a blog, mostly about what I’ve been reading lately: [sparkreader.livejournal.com](http://sparkreader.livejournal.com).



*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is an author as well as a career library media specialist and member of the Maine Association of School Libraries Executive Board. She is the author of four picture books, most recently Our Librarian Won’t Tell Us ANYTHING! A Mrs. Skorupski Story (UpstartBooks, 2006) and many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail Toni at [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*