

The Friendship Doll

Kirby Larson

Reviewed by: Ella Gohari, 12 years old

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The Friendship Doll by Kirby Larson follows Miss Kanagawa, a Japanese doll of the 1920s sent along with 57 others as an “Ambassador of Friendship” in America. Throughout the story, we get to meet four girls that Miss Kanagawa interacts with: revenge-seeking Bunny, daredevil Lois, loving Willie Mae, and adventurous Lucy. The characters are very likeable, and we are able to understand why they do what they do. Another thing I enjoyed about this book was the historical aspect. There actually was an exchange of dolls from Japan to America during the Great Depression, and it was refreshing seeing it from a doll’s perspective.

I also liked the fact that Miss Kanagawa was able to touch four girls’ lives for the better. She is a wise doll, and while she cannot speak, she was able to convey her wisdom to the four girls she interacted with. In addition, the ending was very heartwarming and I enjoyed how it ties in to present day. The changing of setting was something enjoyable as well. Miss Kanagawa went from New York City to Chicago to Kentucky to Oregon, and each setting was fleshed out and had a lot of detail.

However, I do have some complaints. This book was very slow moving, almost to the point where I just wanted to skip to the end and be done with it. I felt that 201 pages was not necessary to convey this story, and while I do like detail, this book seemed almost too detailed. If I am being honest, this book could’ve been four separate ones- one for each girl, because the only thing tying them together was Miss Kanagawa herself. Another thing I disliked was that the story was not so much about the doll, but of the four girls. The title “The Friendship Doll” implies that the focus is going to be on Miss Kanagawa and her journey, but it was mostly about each of the girls and their struggles.

Nevertheless, if you are into historical fiction and are around the ages of 10-14, this book is definitely right for you. I would recommend borrowing from the library, but it can be worth a purchase if this type of story interests you.