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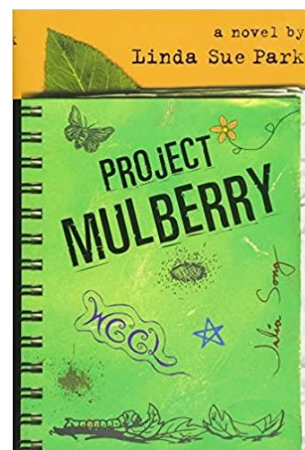
January 6, 2021

## **The Entomology of *Project Mulberry***

### **Introduction**

*Project Mulberry* by Linda Sue Park

Linda Sue Park is a Korean American author who writes for young readers. She has won a Newbery Award for her book *A Single Shard* while her book *Project Mulberry* was Nebraska's Golden Sower nominee in 2007-2008. This book, published by Clarion Books in 2005, is targeted towards middle-school aged children. While reading this book, readers will learn about mulberry trees and silkworms.



### **Summary**

Julia and Patrick are best friends who walk to school, do homework, have dinner, and attend the same activities together. As members of the Wiggle Club, the two decide to do a project for the state fair in Animal Husbandry. Living in the city, they quickly figure out that it would be difficult to do a project with a farm animal, and their townhouses don't allow traditional pets like cats and dogs. Julia's mother isn't too fond of reptiles, and hamsters are too boring. Julia's mother, a Korean immigrant to the United States, shares a story about her mother raising silkworms and harvesting their silk. Patrick, intrigued by this story, is determined that the two should do a project with silkworms.

Julia and Patrick prepare an artificial habitat for their new silkworms and are able to track down a mulberry tree in the backyard of a helpful Black gentleman near them to collect leaves for the silkworms' food. Throughout the project, Julia and Patrick experience many life lessons.

Park, L. S. (2005). *Project Mulberry*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

### **Discussion**

1. Explain how mulberries relate to silkworms.
  - a. Why would silkworms have a hard time living naturally in Plainfield, Illinois?
  - b. Describe the artificial habitat Patrick and Julia create for the silkworms.
2. How do Julia's feelings about the silkworms change as the eggs arrive, start developing, and hatch into larvae?
3. Patrick explains that he has scoleciphobia, fear of worms. While he does not know the cause of his fear, why might people have fears of insects/arthropods? (Apiphobia-fear of bees, Myrmecophobia-fear of ants, Arachnophobia-fear of spiders)
4. Another theme of the book is racial equality. Julia's mom appears to have a bias towards black people, which Patrick believes to be related to Julia's mom's first encounter with minorities being the Black American soldiers during the Korean War. Julia does not like silkworms for her project because she associates them as being "too Korean."
  - a. What biases do humans tend to have towards insects? Are these biases fair?
  - b. Using the book and your own knowledge of insects, make a list of ways insects benefit humans.

5. Sericulture is the practice of breeding silkworms for silk production, which has been done for over 5000 years. This has led to domesticated silkworms that are unable to survive without human assistance and fewer wild populations.
  - a. What other insects do humans exploit (take advantage of) for their products?
  - b. Have these exploitations led to success or failure of these insect populations?
6. From the project advisor, Mr. Maxwell, Julia and Patrick learn about sustainable farming. Patrick wants to try it with the silkworm farm.
  - a. What do the kids do to make their farm sustainable?
  - b. What are the advantages and disadvantages of sustainable farming?
7. Reread page 148 and draw a picture of a silkworm as Julia describes it (pre-first molt). Compare her description and your drawing to an actual picture of a silkworm in the same stage of development.
8. An entomologist is a person who studies insects.
  - a. How did Julia and Patrick act like true entomologists while completing their project?
  - b. How does one become an entomologist? (Research using reliable sources.)
  - c. Would you consider becoming an entomologist? Why or why not?
9. What have you learned about silkworms from reading this book?