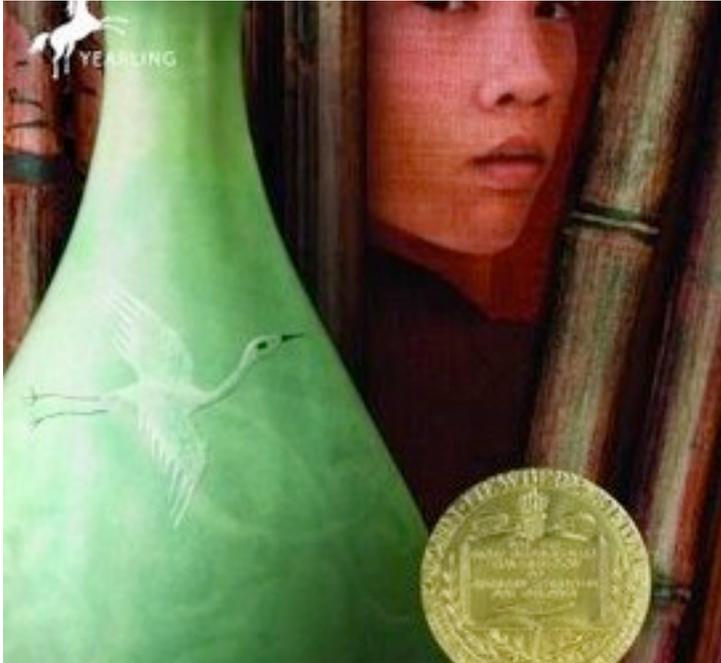


A Children's Book Comes Alive

By [Roxanne Ray](#)

Posted in [Arts](#), Volume 38 No. 4



Seattle Children's Theatre is bringing literature and performance together.

In a new adaptation of Linda Sue Park's children's book "A Single Shard," playwright Robert Schenkkan works with SCT's Artistic Director Linda Hartzell, who will direct the show.

Schenkkan and Hartzell had collaborated previously, and were seeking an opportunity to do so again.

"Linda brought the book to me," says Schenkkan, "and I loved the story and thought that it had real dramatic possibilities."

Park was thrilled about the idea.

"I learned through my agent that SCT was interested in the book," Park said. "It was very exciting to think that a Pulitzer-Prize winning playwright would be adapting the story, and that such a reputable theatre would be staging the play."

Schenkkan then began the process of adaptation.

"I read the book over and over again, and then did a little research into the period and into Korean culture, history, and theatrical styles," he says.

"There were a couple of unique challenges with this material: the novel is very episodic and there is a strong narrative voice, neither of which works very well on

stage.”

So Schenkkan began scripting the text. “The first challenge was met by strongly pruning and focusing the material and creating an aesthetic that is very presentational,” he says. “We acknowledge up front that this is theater, these are actors, and we are going to do our ‘transformations’ right in front of you.”

Park’s sense of children’s literature dovetails with Schenkkan’s streamlining efforts. “Writing for young people,” she says, “requires greater economy of language, scrupulous word choice, and a tighter focus on story.”

This selectivity mirrors Park’s early years in writing.

“Early in my career, I had to juggle writing with raising a young family and teaching full time,” she says. “A lot of balls got dropped!”

But, Park reports, “my children are grown now, and while I still have a second job (speaking instead of teaching), it’s much more flexible. I can pick and choose which invitations to accept.”

The creative process, however, remains the most exciting. “The challenge of writing itself is the same as it has always been,” Park reports. “The blank page (or screen, as I do most of my work on the computer) remains as provocative and terrifying as ever.”

Schenkkan also finds the revision and rehearsal process illuminating. In rehearsal with Linda Hartzell, Schenkkan works to focus the spectator’s interest.

“Sometimes, this has meant cutting something I was rather fond of,” he admits, “but Linda is almost always right about this, and at the end of the day, the imperative of keeping our audience’s attention throughout and never letting it waver, is critical.”

Park shares this interest in connecting with her readers and audiences.

“I travel widely to speak at schools and conferences about books and writing,” she says. “I get to visit with students of all ages, and with writers, teachers, librarians and booksellers. Writing is a solitary endeavor, and I really enjoy these opportunities to spend time with people who care about books as much as I do.”

Park also welcomes the opportunity to come to Seattle again, after recently serving as faculty for a weekend retreat by the Western Washington chapter of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators. “I’ve been to Seattle several times and always love visiting.”

“I will be attending the evening performance on March 10,” Park adds. “I can’t wait!”

“A Single Shard” runs through March 18 at the Seattle Children’s Theatre, 201 Thomas Street, Seattle.