



2018

Red Butterfly

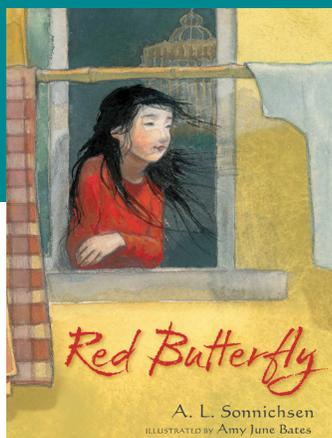
Emily Loveless

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Book Review

Red Butterfly

Author

A.L. Sonnichsen

Illustrator

Amy June Bates

Reviewer

Emily Loveless

Rating

Outstanding

Level

Primary, Intermediate,
Young Adult

Pages

400

Year

2015

Publisher

Simon & Schuster Books

ISBN

9781481411097

Abandoned at birth, Kara has called an elderly American woman “mama” for the last eleven years. Now that she’s older, she’s looking for answers to questions like why Mama never goes outside, and why can’t they move to live with Daddy in Montana? It is sobering to learn that, according to the Chinese government, Kara doesn’t exist, and that Mama stayed in China illegally to care for her. Their secluded days make more sense, but when Kara’s visiting “sister” has to be taken to the hospital, their life is blown wide open. Suddenly, Kara is separated from the only family she’s ever known. She is taken to an orphanage and informed that she will be placed for adoption, and it is essentially impossible for Mama and Daddy to adopt her legally. Lost, hurt, and in shock, Kara can do little but say goodbye when an American family from Florida arrive to take her “home.” But Kara doesn’t want a new family, and accepting her new life is a challenge that seems impossible to overcome until kindness and understanding teach her how to really soar.

Red Butterfly is an emotional journey told powerfully in lyrical verse. A.L. Sonnichsen has integrated several of her own personal experiences with China’s child policy laws and orphanage struggles to give real and painful depth to Kara’s story. Conditions and events in the orphanage are especially poignant. The verse formatting is easy to read and flows naturally, granting the reader an intimate view of Kara’s experiences and highlights important feelings and moments in a unique way that may especially appeal to readers who struggle with more traditionally constructed novels. Sonnichsen has delivered a story that marries the common coming-of-age story with a complex and often unforgiving adult world. Kara cannot control anything of her physical situation or location, and yet she discovers ways to heal, grow, and blossom. Her story introduces readers to issues in a way that makes you want to learn more and would provide a powerful beginning to a home or classroom discussion on international cultures and concerns.