

In the name of
passion: yin and yang
in a single shard



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Beyond the realms of imagination stands a dark stained door, gleaming with light between the hinges. Tree-Ear, a young boy in the book *A Single Shard* by Linda Sue Park, in some ways leads the representative life of a poor individual in 12th century Korea. Tree-Ear goes beyond the social barriers and peers into the light - an act that was deemed impossible by an ordinary Korean citizen. He learns that there were always be darkness in his path to the light. Throughout her narrative, Park relies on symbolism to depict the true meaning of the Yin and Yang, in order to thoroughly capture his tenacious, unique, spiritual and enlightened character.

One way that the author depicts Tree-ear's spiritual and tenacious character is through the use of the Yin and Yang symbol. Tree-Ear views the world in black and white, because while the rain collapses down like shards of broken glass, he remembers the springtime: a temple of blooms, blessings, and new beginnings. Tree-ear is particularly fond of Min's prunus vase, due to the "sharp angles of the plum twigs" (52). Let me begin by an introduction to the prominent value of "plum twigs" in Korea. "Plum twigs" are perceived as gateways to the spring season, and are constant reminders of spring's beauty. These plants grow in barren landscapes and are capable of withholding the harshness of the winter. The use of plum twigs in this quote, correlates to the meaning of the Yin and Yang symbol. It shows us how two contradicting forces are playing together to achieve something beautifully "symmetrical" (52). This directly correlates to the fact that the Yin and the Yang is a combination of a perfectly "symmetrical" circle. Anyways, just like plum twigs, Tree- Ear is capable of withstanding all the obstacles that bring him down. Even after years of living under the darkness of the bridge, he still

has hope that he might one day touch the light. This is a definite example of Tree-Ear's tenacious and spiritual character. Another illustration of the Yin and Yang symbol is shown in the quote; " Tree-Ear grew in wrinkled half-circles on dead or fallen tree trunks, emerging from the rotten wood, without a parent seed" (7). The fact that Tree-ear grew in a very desolate and dim environment signifies the fact that the negative and positive forces within him are not balanced. The quote, " dead.. fallen tree trunks," symbolizes how a part of him is damaged. However, in scientific terms, there is much circulation and energy going on inside tree trunks. Thus, the fact that the Tree-trunks were no longer functioning signifies how there was no hope for Tree-ear to renew/ restore his place in society. Also, since the Yin and Yang symbol is a full circle, the fact that Tree-ear grew in " half circles," further emphasizes how the negative and positive forces within him are not balanced.

However, all of this changes when he decides to step out of his comfort zone. The fact that the " plum Trees blossomed; petals fell like snow, leaving behind any green buttons that hid shyly among the leaves" (47) signifies how Tree-ear is entering the stage of spiritual awakening. In this quote, the description of the " green buttons" vividly illuminates the picture of a fungus. Just like the " green buttons," tree-ears are considered to be fungus, too. The fact that the " green buttons" were no longer hidden by the leaves symbolizes how Tree- ear is no longer hidden by the darkness. He is blossoming into a more courageous person who isn't acting " shyly" or afraid of the unknown. This is an example of how the negative and positive forces within him, are finally consolidating with one another. Therefore, we see how

his balance of the Yin and Yang (positive and negative forces) built him into a more spiritual and tenacious person. In closing, Tree-Ear uses his spectacles of imagination to drive towards the darkness with a great grip to the light ahead. He passes through the isolation, he passes through the sorrowful days, he passes through all the grief, and he finally reaches the light, where he is no longer broken apart. The symbolism of the Yin and Yang was used to create an image of two half circles, slowly consolidating to one another, shaping Tree-ear into a more spiritual and tenacious person.

The author also depicts Tree-Ear's unique character is through the use of the Yin and Yang symbol. Tree-Ear's roots were once bound to the ground, excluded from the sustenance of the sunless kingdom. After enduring many dark and rainy days, Tree-Ear broke out of the roots that society was built upon, and soaked in the sunlight he thought would never touch him. In Korean culture, your roots determine your stance in society. Unfortunately Tree-Ear " grew without the benefit of a parent seed (7)," making him an outsider to the class-based society. A " seed" holds many secrets. It is the ultimate beginning and end of everything- the dawn and death to life. The entire earth depends on this tiny substance- a rounded object that holds so much significance for the human existence. Tree-Ear was not given all the essential conditions to grow and mature normally because he had no " seed" to begin with. He learned to grow through his experiences, rather than having a parental guide to rely on. But you see, that is where his true potential comes from. Tree-Ear could face his inner and outer adversaries, all in the name of passion. When the firing blaze of the sunlight extinguished, when the stars meandered out into eternal space, and when the earth

appeared to be pathless and cold, Tree-Ear was born. The Yin symbol had much control over Tree-Ear's early years- having no "parent seed" or stability, allowed him to generate a hard-wired instinct to succeed. Here, the Yin symbol is allowing Tree-Ear to grow into a unique individual- one who induces a tremendous amount of passion and perseverance. Unlike all the other kids, Tree-Ear had to work hard to get the family he always wanted. Tree-Ear manifested his dream into reality when he "dropped" (16) Min's pottery work. The Yin symbol played a significant role in Tree-Ear's inquiry. If he didn't drop the pottery work, he would've never worked for Min in the first place. Min can be seen as the antagonist in Tree-Ear's journey, because while he is the only hope for Tree-Ear to learn the art of pottery- he is also the person who prohibits him from achieving his goals. The name Min is also closely associated with the word Yin (negative force). However, after many long, dreadful days of work, he was finally able to capture the heart of Min, who made Tree-Ear a part of his family. Here, the Yang symbol is working considerably to shine light into Tree-Ear's life. If Tree-Ear was born with the "benefit of a parent seed," he would've been an entirely different person- one that holds the same interests and conservative ideologies as other people. Being an upper-class citizen in Korea means that you have a family and an easy access to everything. However, for a lower class citizen, it was almost impossible to raise your stance in society. After so much pain and hardship, Tree-Ear managed to achieve the impossible- an act that only a truly unique person can perform. The darkness (Yin) shaped Tree-Ear into a unique individual, which allowed him to drive into the light (Yang). While the rest of society views the world in black and white, Tree-Ear regards all the shades of a rainbow. He notices the darkness of the sky more vividly, the liveliness of <https://assignbuster.com/in-the-name-of-passion-yin-and-yang-in-a-single-shard/>

the grass more intensely, and the beauty of the sunlight more accurately than anyone else. Finally, the author captures Tree-Ear's enlightened character through the use of the Yin and Yang symbol. Tree-Ear was once a seed situated underneath the dark depths of the ground. In the wake of a long, dreadful rain, he developed into a Tree, a Tree that extended up into the sky, and into the bright sunlight. This stage, in particular, depicts Tree-Ear's growth since he accumulated in a lot of wisdom and knowledge throughout his journey. Tree-Ear's life is primarily built upon a pattern- he lives under a bridge, he lost his only friend, and he struggles to survive every day- but then he finds a home, a family, and a place for hospitality. When coincidences occur, we often feel like there is a deep pattern of significance- like our footsteps are being guided. Tree-Ear's body was encompassed with negative energies- energies that gravitated him towards the ground. When Tree-Ear was about to give up on his dreams, he sees a deer -" a clear vision emerging from a cloudy dream" (75). In this particular moment, Tree-Ear had no balance or control over the connection and detachment of his consciousness. He was forced to turn his attention towards this deer. The deer was sent by the earth, to guide Tree-Ear further into his journey. Although he couldn't touch the deer, he could see it clearly. This angelic deer allowed Tree-Ear to envision his own " dream" more vividly- incorporating faith and trust into his heart. Here, the Yang symbol is working considerably to exalt hope into Tree-Ear- making him only a few steps further from enlightenment. Just when Tree-Ear felt like he has conquered all his fears and desires, he spots a fox, and " blinks to clear vision" (114). The fox, indeed, is a representation of Tree-Ear's deepest and darkest fears.

There might be damaging forces arising from Tree-ear's unconscious: when Tree-ear sees the fox, he "squeezed his eyes shut to block out the fox's evil stare" (114). The fact that he doesn't want to look into its eyes, signifies how he fears for his future. The fox consumed all the hope that he accumulated from the deer. When he "blinks to clear vision" and opens it again, he notices that the fox disappeared. That is when he learned that fear does not exist- that it is nothing but a black fog of smoke. He could've run away from his fears, but he stayed firmly onto the ground- demonstrating true bravery. Here the Yin symbol is also working considerably to comply courage into Tree-Ear- making him only a step away from enlightenment. When Tree-Ear came back with good news of his journey, he is then followed by news of Crane-man's death. This led him to start feeling "detached" (143) from his body. Detachment symbolizes a rebirth- or how he is letting a part of his old self let go. When Ajma names Tree-Ear, Hyung-pil, this shows us how he has established a new identity- one that is enlightened. The Yin and Yang worked perfectly together, to give Tree-Ear his new family, home, and hospitality. When life seems like an endless road of lies, Tree-Ear tries to locate the truth. As Tree-Ear's leaves are whisked away by the wind, he remains unscathed by the sorrow and despair of summer's leave. Instead, he bathes in the rain and waits for a flood to nourish his roots. Finally, after about a year, Tree-Ear managed to develop into a mighty tree.

Linda Sue Park's symbolic use of the Yin and Yang symbol gave readers an insight to Tree-Ear's spiritual, unique, and tenacious character. Tree-Ear's distinct character traits allowed him to escape the black hole in his mind and grow into an enlightened person- capable of receiving the sustenance of the

sun. Unfortunately, Tree-Ear lives under the shadows of society - a lonesome figure trying to stretch out from the isolated realms of darkness. The author's symbolic techniques created an image of a tiny sprout of seed growing from a dark hole in the mind of Tree-Ear - eventually developing into a garden filled with fragrance and immense sunlight. This story induces a deep hidden message about life. It teaches us that there will always be darkness in the path to the light and that we must consider; the sunlight in the night sky, the seas in the clouds, the stars in the daylight, and a forest in the desert.