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Totto-Chan: The Little Girl At The Window



Synopsis

This engaging series of childhood recollections tells about an ideal school in Tokyo during World War II that combined learning with fun, freedom, and love. This unusual school had old railroad cars for classrooms, and it was run by an extraordinary man-its founder and headmaster, Sosaku Kobayashi-who was a firm believer in freedom of expression and activity. In real life, the Totto-chan of the book has become one of Japan's most popular television personalities-Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. She attributes her success in life to this wonderful school and its headmaster. The charm of this account has won the hearts of millions of people of all ages and made this book a runaway bestseller in Japan, with sales hitting the 4.5 million mark in its first year.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What a wonderful book! I've never read anything quite like it, although it reminded me quite a bit of various Hayao Miyazaki animated films I've seen in the past. "Totto-chan" is a memoir in the guise of a novel. The author's childhood self is the main character and the events described actually took place while she attended a creative school called Tomoe Gakuen in pre-war Tokyo. This proves to be an interesting narrative device because the story is told from the emotional and experiential point of view of a child, but with the knowingness and articulateness of an adult. The obvious fondness or at least understanding of the author toward her younger self serves to enhance the overall sensation of empathy the story engenders, for that is the primary theme of the school and what the children were learning there. Led by the visionary headmaster, Sosaku Kobayashi, the Tomoe school's philosophy is built on trusting children to be themselves, "let nature lead."

as Kobayashi put it. The story is filled with anecdotes of Totto-chan and her classmates being entrusted to figure things out for themselves, with adults and authority figures like the headmaster and parents simply listening and providing confidence that the children will succeed in coming up with workable solutions as they learn to navigate the world around them. Mistakes and slipups (such as Totto-chan falling into the school's cesspool) are treated with dignity and patience. Instruction and structure come in the form of simple guidelines (for lunch, students were asked to bring something from the hills and something from the sea •) with the belief that the children will be motivated to find their own solution with a limited amount of information.

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