

Powerful Imagery and Settings in David Guterson's Snow Falling on Cedars

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Powerful Imagery and Settings in David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*

Snow Falling on Cedars, a novel by David Guterson, is a post World War II drama set in 1954 on the island of San Piedro in Washington State. The story's focal point is the murder trial of Kabuo Miyamoto, who is accused of killing a fellow islander, Carl Heine, Jr., supposedly because of an old family feud over land. Although the trial is the main focus of the story, Guterson takes the reader back in time through flashbacks to tell a story of forbidden love involving two young islanders, Ishmael Chambers and Hatsue Imada (Kabuo's future wife). At the time of their romance, interracial relationships were considered strictly taboo because of racial bias. It is through both this love story and Guterson's remarkable use of setting and imagery that the reader is informed as to why racial prejudice is so high on the island of San Piedro at the time of the trial and why Kabuo is not merely on trial for Carl's murder, but also for the color of his skin. While *Snow Falling on Cedars* has a well-rounded cast of characters, demands strong emotional reactions, and radiates the importance of racial equality and fairness, it is not these elements alone that make this tale stand far out from other similar stories. It is through Guterson's powerful and detailed imagery and settings that this story really comes to life. The words, the way he uses them to create

amazing scenes and scenarios in this story, makes visualizing them an effortless and enjoyable task. Streets are given names and surroundings, buildings are given color and history, fields and trees are given height and depth, objects are given textures and smells, and even the weather is given a purpose in the..... middle of paperght out of the book and construct in front of the readers eyes, rather than form in the back of their minds. To sum up the overall experience that Snow Falling on Cedars delivers through imagery and setting would be to say that it is like a pop-up book for adults, without the need for the pop-up feature. Racial tension is not something that can be imagined or understood without some sort of emotional history or background attached to it. Emotions like hatred or others, such as desire, that the characters feel for one another, would feel shallow and empty without the descriptions that make them seem real and understandable. All these elements need to be present in order for the story to carry itself and the reader through to the end. Snow Falling on Cedars does that and more. Work Cited Guterson, David. Snow Falling on Cedars. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

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