

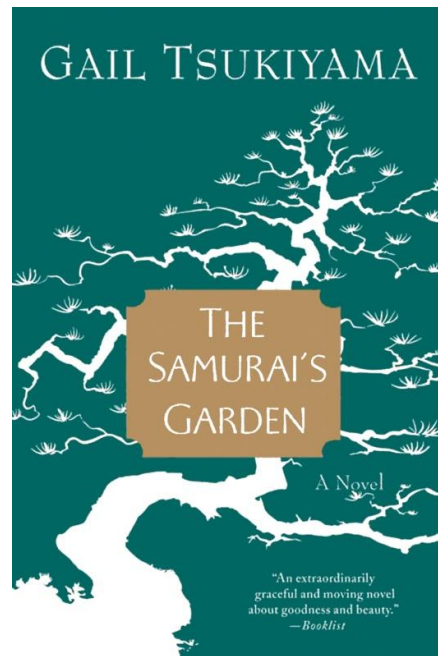
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Samurai's Garden*

*By Gail Tsukiyama*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Samurai's Garden* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Samurai's Garden*.

### About the Book

The daughter of a Chinese mother and a Japanese father, Tsukiyama uses the Japanese invasion of China during the late 1930s as a somber backdrop for her unusual story about a 20-year-old Chinese painter named Stephen who is sent to his family's summer home in a Japanese coastal village to recover from a bout with tuberculosis. Here he is cared for by Matsu, a reticent housekeeper and a master gardener. Over the course of a remarkable year, Stephen learns Matsu's secret and gains not only physical strength, but also profound spiritual insight. Matsu is a samurai of the soul, a man devoted to doing good and finding beauty in a cruel and arbitrary world, and Stephen is a noble student, learning to appreciate Matsu's generous and nurturing way of life and to love Matsu's soulmate, gentle Sachi, a woman afflicted with leprosy.



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## About the Author

Born to a Chinese mother and a Japanese father in San Francisco, **Gail Tsukiyama** now lives in El Cerrito, California. Her novels include *Dreaming Water*, *Women of the Silk*, *The Language of Threads*, and *Night of Many Dreams*.

## Discussion Questions

1. The title of the novel obviously alludes to Matsu's garden, but to whom else could the title refer as a "Samurai"? Why?
2. The garden acts as a center or core of the novel. All three central characters (Stephen, Matsu, and Sachi) find some sense of comfort in tending the garden. What are some of the metaphors for the garden and how are they worked out in the novel?
3. Loneliness, solitude, and isolation are all themes that permeate the novel throughout. How do the three central characters' approaches to these feelings vary, resemble each other, and evolve?
4. It appears as though Stephen and Sachi are somehow juxtaposed. How is this connection represented and developed?
5. How is the politically turbulent time at which *The Samurai's Garden* takes place approached in the novel? Is it a strongly political novel or does the world of Tamuri somehow defy and avoid the political turmoil of the era?
6. How is Stephen and Keiko's relationship represented? Examine it in relation to the courtships of the past--Kenzo and Sachi, as well as Matsu and Sachi.
7. As the novel progresses, Stephen stops longing to return to his home and in fact dreads having to leave Tamuri. What provokes this change of heart? Also, how does this sentiment affect the ending of the novel?

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