The Language of Threads

By Gail Tsukiyama

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about The Language of Threads 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 Language of Threads.

About the Book

Readers of Women of the Silk never forgot the moving, powerful story of Pei, brought to work in the silk house as a girl, grown into a quiet but determined young woman whose life is subject to cruel twists of fate, including the loss of her closest friend, Lin. Now we finally learn what happened to Pei, as she leaves the silk house for Hong Kong in the 1930s, arriving with a young orphan, Ji Shen, in her care. Her first job, in the home of a wealthy family, ends in disgrace, but soon Pei and Ji Shen find a new life in the home of Mrs. Finch, a British ex-patriate who welcomes them as the daughters she never had. Their idyllic life is interrupted, however, by war, and the Japanese occupation. Pei is once again forced to make her own way, struggling to survive and to keep her extended family alive as well. In this story of hardship and survival, Tsukiyama paints a portrait of women fighting the forces of war and time to make a life for themselves.

About the Author

Discussion Questions

1. When Pei and Ji Shen first arrive in Hong Kong, they meet the rickshaw boy, Quan, who takes them to their boarding house. How does he represent the bustling city of Hong Kong and what role does he play in both Pei and Ji Shen's life?

2. Discuss how the sisterhood was able to thrive in Hong Kong after the demise of the silk villages in China. How were they able to remain a unionized faction?

3. Why is Pei determined that Ji Shen get an education rather than immediately become a domestic servant? How does this put a strain on their relationship?

4. Pei first goes to work for a Chinese family, which ends in disgrace. She then goes to work for an English woman, Mrs. Finch, whom she grows to love. What are some of the distinctions in each household and how does Pei cope in each?

5. Discuss how Pei, Ji Shen, and Mrs. Finch become a tight-knit family of their home despite social differences.

6. Discuss Mrs. Finch's internment at Stanley camp. How did they function within the camp? How do Pei and Ji Shen make her imprisonment more comfortable?

7. Ji Shen becomes involved with a man named Lock and the black market in Hong Kong during the occupation. In what ways does Pei try to get her out of it? Does she succeed?

8. Why do you think Pei refuses Lin's brother Ho Yung's offer of marriage?

9. After the war and Mrs. Finch's death, Pei becomes an invisible mender or seamstress rather than returning to work as a domestic servant. How does her new business turn her life around?

10. Pei's friend Lin remains a powerful memory throughout the book. The past is never far from her mind. How does the bond between her and Pei change the way Pei lives her life?

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