

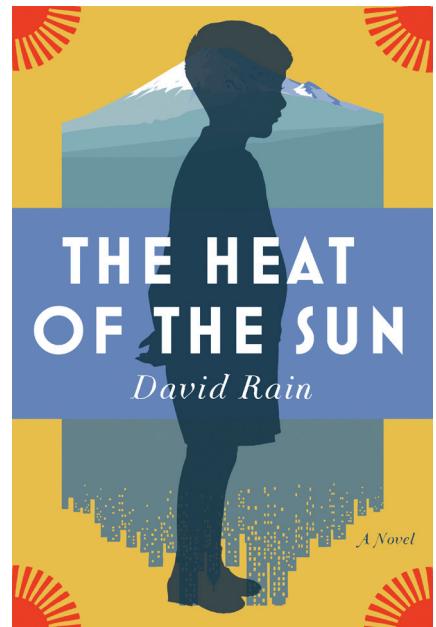


# Reading Group Gold

## The Heat of the Sun David Rain

### Discussion Questions

1. The story is written as a continuation of the narrative in Puccini's opera, *Madame Butterfly*. How effective is the story in its translation as a novel? How does the structure of the novel as an opera affect your reading experience? Are there other elements in the novel that inextricably link it to the opera? What role does music play in the mood and setting of the scenes?
2. As much as the Pinkertons try to change the course of their past, the events in Nagasaki come back to haunt them. How much of a role does fate play in the characters' lives? Do you think that people have their destinies laid out before them, or are we able to shape the outcome of our lives?
3. Trouble says that he lived in the wrong world when he was in America. What are the things that helped mold his identity? Do you think that we are the products of our nature or our upbringing?
4. Senator Pinkerton and his wife Kate try to construct perfect lives as public figures, yet it all comes crumbling down in the end. Are they sympathetic characters or are they solely motivated by their selfish desires? Do you believe that Kate Pinkerton really loved Trouble as her own son?
5. Kate and the Senator see Woodley as a big influence on Trouble, despite his own denial of the power of his influence. Describe the relationship between the two friends. How much of an effect does Woodley have on Trouble? On the Pinkertons as a whole?
6. Describe the relationship between Le Vol and Woodley. How does their friendship evolve throughout the course of the novel, and how do you think it might have changed had they not been interrupted in the graveyard? What does Woodley mean when he says, "Something, it seemed, had ended for us, or had never really begun?" How does their relationship compare to Woodley's relationship with Trouble?
7. Woodley's ashplant kept his leg weak throughout most of his life. How does he develop throughout the novel from his days as the crippled orphan? Are there other things in the novel that he had to let go of in order to achieve his full potential?
8. Madame Butterfly ended her own life with the concept of "die with honor when you can no longer live with honor." Do Senator Pinkerton and Kate Pinkerton succeed in achieving honorable deaths as well?



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9. The novel follows Trouble and Woodley from their boarding school days until their golden years. Despite their old age however, the men seem to maintain a certain boyish quality about themselves. Kate Pinkerton even states that “all men are boys.” Do you agree with this statement? What does it mean to be a man in the context of the novel?
10. We learn from the beginning of the story that Woodley keeps his silence about the Pinkerton affair until after his death. What does he achieve by divulging the story posthumously? Why do you think Woodley decides to keep the knowledge of Trouble’s survival a secret?
11. The idea of Nirvana is a recurrent theme in the novel. In the end of the book, we see that Trouble believes that “Nirvana’s got no lookout at all.” What does this mean? Do you think that Nirvana has a different meaning for each character in the novel? Do you think they reach theirs in the end?