

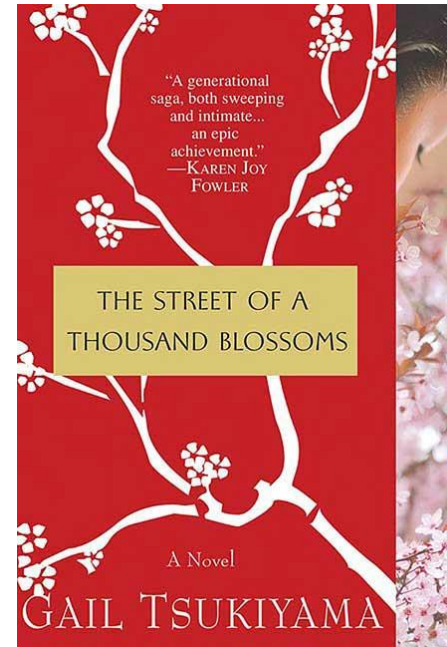
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Street of a Thousand Blossoms*

*By Gail Tsukiyama*

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Street of a Thousand Blossoms* 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 Street of a Thousand Blossoms*.

### About the Book

It is Tokyo in 1939. On the Street of a Thousand Blossoms, two orphaned brothers dream of a future firmly rooted in tradition. The older boy, Hiroshi, shows early signs of promise at the national obsession of sumo wrestling, while Kenji is fascinated by the art of Noh theater masks.

But as the ripples of war spread to their quiet neighborhood, the brothers must put their dreams on hold—and forge their own paths in a new Japan. Meanwhile, the two young daughters of a renowned sumo master find their lives increasingly intertwined with the fortunes of their father's star pupil, Hiroshi.

*The Street of a Thousand Blossoms* is a powerfully moving masterpiece about tradition and change, loss and renewal, and love and family from a glorious storyteller at the height of her powers.



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## About the Author

Gail Tsukiyama is the bestselling author of five previous novels, including *Women of the Silk* and *The Samurai's Garden*, as well as the recipient of the Academy of American Poets Award and the PEN Oakland/Josephine Miles Literary Award. She divides her time between El Cerrito and Napa Valley, California.

## Discussion Questions

1. Tradition plays an important role in *The Street of a Thousand Blossoms*, and one way for traditions to be passed down from generation to generation is through storytelling. Discuss various stories in the novel and their significance for some of the characters.
2. What lessons do Hiroshi and Kenji learn from their grandparents, and how do those lessons serve them in a changing world? How would you compare the marriage between Yoshio and Fumiko to those of their grandsons?
3. Even though no one in the novel ever fights on a battlefield, in what ways does the war shape their lives? How might their lives have been different if there had been no war?
4. Yoshio tells his grandsons on page 23: "Just remember....Every day of your lives, you must always be sure what you're fighting for." What implications does this have for Hiroshi—who literally becomes a great fighter—as well as for other characters in the story?
5. Both Kenji and Aki feel like "ghosts" among the living. In what other ways are they similar—and different? Why do you think Kenji survives, while Aki gives up?
6. Art and beauty are obviously central in the lives of Kenji and Akira, as well as the violinist Mariko. What roles do they play in other characters' lives? How does beauty help—or not help—sustain the characters in difficult times? What does Haru mean when she says that she sees "such beauty" at the end of the Prologue?
7. The four central female characters—Fumiko, Aki, Haru, and Mika—lead very different lives. In what ways do they represent the changing roles of women, and in what ways do they represent their individual natures and circumstances? How do you regard each of these characters?
8. Kenji gives Hiroshi a poem before his first big match: *Winter solitude/in a world of one color/the sound of wind*. What do you think it means to Hiroshi? To Kenji?
9. Hiroshi, Akira, and Kenji all achieve considerable fame. What are its rewards and pitfalls for them?



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10. Members of the *kasutori* generation are filled with “guilt and grief,” clinging to the past while also struggling to find their own way in a “new” Japan. In what ways do Kenji and Hiroshi, as well as Aki, Haru, and Mika, rebel against the “old” Japan of their childhood? In what ways do they embrace it?
11. The novel spans several stages in the history of Japan: pre-war, war, reconstruction and post-war boom. What happens to the landscape of Tokyo in these different stages? How does the changing landscape affect the characters?
12. Discuss the role of family in various characters’ lives. What joys and sorrows does it bring them?

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