

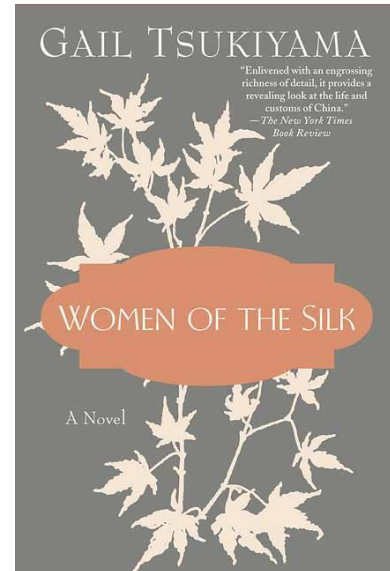
READING GROUP GUIDE

Women of the Silk

By Gail Tsukiyama

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Women of the Silk* 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 *Women of the Silk*.

About the Book

In *Women of the Silk* Gail Tsukiyama takes her readers back to rural China in 1926, where a group of women forge a sisterhood amidst the reeling machines that reverberate and clamor in a vast silk factory from dawn to dusk. Leading the first strike the village has ever seen, the young women use the strength of their ambition, dreams, and friendship to achieve the freedom they could never have hoped for on their own. Tsukiyama's graceful prose weaves the details of "the silk work" and Chinese village life into a story of courage and strength.

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*, *The Language of Threads*, *The Samurai's Garden*, and *Night of Many Dreams*.



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Discussion Questions

1. One of Gail Tsukiyama's talents is her ability to reveal a whole world and a culture through subtle details. This novel opens with a very graphic scene, in which Pei's mother gives birth to yet another daughter. How does this one scene introduce the dynamics in Pei's family-and thus a Chinese family-to its audience? What details are important and what larger issues do they signify?
2. The theme of the Chinese family remains in the foreground of the novel throughout. Once Pei arrives at the girls' house how does her own experience in her family compare to the other girls' experiences? Mei-li's family, for example?
3. Once Pei arrives at the girls' house she is struck by the fact that all the girls there look the same - same hairstyle, same clothes. How does this homogeneity affect Pei? For example, examine the scene where Pei looks at herself in the mirror for the first time after being dressed like the others.
4. What are the dynamics between the girls at the silk house? For example, how does Moi affect the girls? How do they regard Chen-Li?
5. On page 90, Lin's mother is described as having lost her "voice" after her husband's death. What implications does this statement have? How does it relate, for example, to Pei's later statement that her own family remained "silent"-meaning they never responded to Pei's letter, nor did they ever come to visit her.
6. Compare the hairdressing ceremony with the wedding ceremony of Lin's brother. How are they similar or different, and what do they symbolize?
7. What drives Pei to participate in the hairdressing ceremony and join "the sisterhood?"
8. What does the ending scene, with Pei leaving for a "new life" in Hong Kong, suggest? How does it affect the way you view the novel and Pei's progress?

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