



Discussion Guide

About the Book



Book Title: *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*

Author: Lisa See

Published by Random House, New York, 2005

Author Website: www.lisasee.com

Book Website: <http://www.lisasee.com/snow-flower-and-the-secret-fan/>

Questions for Discussion

1. What were your general impressions of the book?
2. What do you think was Lisa See's purpose in writing the book?
3. What were the themes of this novel?
4. Were there any characters in the story with whom you identified? Why or why not?
5. What did you learn about 19th century China by reading this book?
6. Read over the MAMs comments. Which of the MAMs do you most agree with and why?
7. Would you recommend this book for other Book Clubs? Why or why not?
8. In what ways, if any, will this book change your life or perspective?

Other Links...

Trailer for Film of the Book: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aa93drpm30E>

Interview with Lisa See on differences between Book and Film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txMp1iTTLEM>

Other discussion guides...

<http://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/snow-flower-and-the-secret-fan>

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Nancy and the MAMs discuss the book...



NANCY: Lisa See's work transports us into 19th century Chinese society where we catch glimpses of the difficult life women lived in those times. Like all good historical fiction, we are drawn not only into the story, but also learn so much about the culture and history in the midst of reading. So often, the history we learn in books leaves out cultural details, and often the stories of women. So Kudos to Lisa for teaching us while weaving a captivating story around the relationship of these two Chinese women, Lily and Snow Flower. Thank you for teaching me while I also enjoyed an intriguing and beautiful story.

Prior to reading this book, I knew about the practice of foot binding, but really didn't want to know more — just like I prefer not to watch war movies, watch violent TV shows or read about torture. But Lisa explains it so well in the context of the culture. She helped me understand how the girls were groomed to accept this practice, and even sometimes proud of the results, if they didn't die or become maimed as many did.

I found Lily's desire for love so captivating in the storyline. Her distrust of those close to her and her perception of personal betrayal seemed to lead to unnecessary suffering, for both her and for those she chose to punish. Yet in the end there was reconciliation of sorts as she atoned for her mistakes through loving the younger generation.

If I were still teaching World History, I would ask my students to read this book to learn about some of the history of China. I encourage all those trying to understand a different culture to venture into this very readable and well written story.



SALLIE: This book made me cry. Those precious little girls suddenly confined to the upper chamber and subjected to torture by their own mothers? How did this every happen? How could a society choose to maim their girl children for life? I always identify with the children, and so I hate this practice. Lisa See's a good writer, but I wish she didn't have the subject matter for this one!



MOLLY: The cruelty, beatings, social injustices in this story are nothing new to my people. African-Americans were subjected to such torture and slavery in the early days of our country. But still, with Sallie, I wonder why? Why are people so cruel to others? I also saw that the secret languages are common for those under oppression. Lily wondering if men new the Nu Shu secret language of women. And slaves often feared their owners would understand their secret codes also. From one society to another society, the cruelty seems apparent way too often.



PRISCILLA: Well, really! I've never considered myself a feminist, but those Chinese went way too far in the way they treated their women! I might become a feminist if I lived there! In the Christian tradition, husbands are supposed to love their wives. I don't think Christians would subject their wives to stay upstairs and in the home all their lives. Much too extreme for even me!



KATHARINE: I agree with Nancy that this is a great work of historical fiction. Most Americans are not very familiar with the history of China. This book gives a nice introduction to the cultural traditions, the ancestor worship, the Taiping Revolution, the family traditions, arranged marriages, the social hierarchy. So many aspects of the society come alive under See's artful writing.



JANE: Well, I was following the entrepreneurs in this story. I loved the way both Snow Flower and Lily's husbands were able to make money in difficult times. During the revolution, the butcher was able to use his skills in the worst of times to make money and survive. Likewise, Lisa's husband took a huge risk and found salt to be a new enterprise to keep his family wealthy in changing times. These are the forward thinking people who come out ahead!



ABIGAIL: I'm with Sallie on this one. Not only what this society did to their girl children, but what they did to the women. I guess many cultures have not treated women very nicely, and domestic violence is still a concern even in our culture, but this seems so extreme in the way they isolated the women. However, I did find the arranged friendships helpful, so that at least the women had friends with whom to walk through the life passages.