

# Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

## The Samurai's Garden by Gail Tsukiyama

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- Tsukiyama began as a poet, and critics describe her style as “poetic narrative”. Do you agree? In what way?
- Would you say that there is an overriding mood of the novel? If so, what is it and how is it achieved?
- What is the role of the “Garden” in this novel?
  - A landscape of original innocence and refuge
  - Sachi's = Zen meditation
- In what way is Matsu a true samurai?
  - Serves with fidelity
  - A man of honour
  - Saved Sachi and Stephen
  - Wooden bridge in garden represents Samurai's difficult path from this life to the afterlife
- Is there another character who may be considered to be a samurai?
  - Sachi? True to those she loved
  - True to her purpose
- How are the politically turbulent times during which The Samurai's Garden is set approached in the novel?
  - Compares and contrasts Chinese and Japanese cultures
  - Political events parallel
  - Stephen's journey between the two cultures
  - Stephen's friendship with “the enemy” — how is it affected by the war?
- What was Stephen's relationship with Matsu?
  - With Sachi?
- Stephen falls in love with Keiko. How does this relationship compare or contrast to that of Matsu and Sachi?
- How do the marital problems of his parents impact on Stephen's life in Tarumi?
- Is Kenzo a villain in this novel?
- The author is both Chinese and Japanese. How is this evident in her writing?
- What part do rituals play in the life in Tarumi?
- Is Stephen healed?
  - He opens his journal and begins
  - All bad is a learning experience
- Did Matsu seem indifferent to Stephen's affliction? Why?
- Stephen says “I knew I would never be able to step back into the comfortable past.” What does he mean?
- Why didn't Matsu marry Sachi years ago and move to Yamaguchi with her?
  - Kenzo was his friend
- How do the various characters in the novel react to the scourge of leprosy?
- There is a strong sense of place permeating this novel. How was that achieved?



**Skokie Public Library**

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- Do Pie (Penelope) and Keiko reflect a more modernized Asian woman? How do they differ from Sachi and Tomoko, Matsu's sister?
- Historically speaking we hear of the "Rape of Nanking." How does that differ from the account in this book of the Japanese assault on that Chinese city? Why?
- Does modern Western culture impact on these characters in any way?
  - father feels western names will help in business
  - Pie rolling bandages
- Why did Tsukiyama write this novel in the form of a journal. Was that effective? How so?
  - everything is filtered through Stephen's mind
- What is the effect of the seasons in the book?
  - "Even if you walk the same road a hundred times, you'll find something different each time." p. 210
  - Reflects his own journey
  - Forms a continuous cycle
- What is the effect of the physical absence of his parents on Stephen's life?
  - How was Stephen's father portrayed?
  - Mother and Mah Jong
- What is the role of art in Stephen's life?
- What does Stephen learn from the lepers of Yamaguchi?
- In what way was Stephen a catalyst?