

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET

by Jamie Ford

- Music represents an important part of the story. How does it form a connection between the characters? How does it isolate them?
- All the characters in this novel follow certain cultural traditions and not others. In the case of Henry's family how do his mother and father adhere to tradition? What traditions does Henry follow? How does Henry depart from tradition?
- Why do you think Henry's father makes him wear an "I am Chinese" button but will not allow him to speak Chinese at home and sends him to a white school? Do you think these actions are sending a consistent message?
- Ethnic tension between Chinese and Japanese people is a central theme in the story. How is this tension expressed in Henry's family? How in Keiko's family? Why do you think that Keiko's family defines themselves as American first? What about Henry's family?
- How does the old generation differ from the new in the case of Henry and Henry's son Marty?
- Do you think Henry can ever completely forgive his father for intercepting his letters to Keiko?
- Sheldon is an interesting character. What role does he play in the novel?
- How would you describe the cafeteria lady, Mrs. Beatty? What function does she play in the novel?
- One criticism is that Ford has given the twelve-year old Henry thoughts and feelings beyond his maturity level. Do you agree or disagree?
- Henry's father is depicted as very bigoted against the Japanese. Do you think the author elicits sympathy for this character in the reader?
- When Henry visits Keiko and her parents in the camp, he says that "the sense of belonging he felt seemed foreign to him and that Keiko's parents seemed more "restful here than his own parents did in their warm cozy home." Why do you think this is true?
- One commentary indicates that "the novel doesn't explore the lives of its female characters in particular detail, but from the details presented they appear bright, capable and open-minded. They are further described as "bridge builders". Would you describe Henry's mother, Keiko and her mother, or Sa



Skokie Public Library

5215 Oakton Street
Skokie, Illinois 60077
847.673.7774 / 847.673.7797 fax
www.skokielineary.info

Skokie Public Library Trustees: Diana Hunter, President;
John Graham, Vice President/President Emeritus; Zelda Rich, Secretary;
Richard Basofin; Susan Greer; Eva Weiner; Karen Parrilli; John M. Wozniak
Director: Carolyn A. Anthony

antha in this way?

- Why do both Henry and Keiko feel like outsiders within their own cultures?
- In what ways does Henry's character change over the course of the novel? What does the adult Henry have in common with his younger self?
- Do you think it's possible for Keiko and Henry to start over after their reunion at the end of the novel? What did you think of the end? Was it appropriate or clichéd?
- Elie Wiesel once said that "the opposite of love is not hate, but indifference." Do you think this sentiment is reflected in the novel?