

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden

- Why did Arthur Golden go through the charade of the Translator's Note?
- The author used several descriptive metaphors in this novel. Pick out a few and be prepared to discuss how they enhanced your appreciation of the story. An example can be found in Chapter 9, p. 105 beginning with "We lead our lives like water flowing down a hill..."
- There has been criticism about cross-gender authors...for example male authors portraying female characters. Was Arthur Golden successful in his portrayal of Sayuri or not? Can you think of any books you've read where the author was not successful in portraying a character of the opposite sex?
- Although both Hatsumomo and Mameha were highly esteemed geisha, how were their different personalities reflected in their lives and their destinies?
- Do you feel that there was enough character development in this novel?
- Are there any similarities between the Western view of love and passion and the role of the geisha?
- Relationships between a geisha and her Danna have certain restrictions. Should Sayuri have had as her lifetime goal to get the Chairman as her danna? Was that too romantic a goal on her part?
- Did Chiyo's parents have any other options other than selling her and her sister, Satsu?
- Was there any altruism on Mr. Tanaka's part ... or was he simply after a finder's fee?
- What did you think of the character Nobu? Enough was enough? Was it realistic for him to wait so long to become her protector?
- Were there too many facts presented to the reader?
- Did the explicit sexual scenes disturb you? Or were they necessary?
- Was Sayuri incredibly naïve concerning Hatsumomo's intentions?
- Are geisha simply prostitutes? Highly respected artists? Courtesans? Are wives simply legal prostitutes?
- Were you surprised that Pumpkin betrayed Sayuri? Was Sayuri unrealistic in her desire for friendship with Pumpkin? Was she responsible for Pumpkin's fall?
- The geisha's life and role seems based on deception (no true feelings must be shown). Does it seem reasonable that they could maintain this lifestyle throughout a lifetime?
- What did you think of the role and character of Mother, Auntie & Granny? Parasitic & reprehensible? Nurturing?
- Knowing Hatsumomo as they must have, why did they charge Sayuri for both the ruined kimono & the stolen pin?
- Who was the worst character in this novel? Dr. Crab? Hatsumomo? Mother? Pumpkin?
- What were the worst aspects about becoming a geisha? Mizuage? Complete submission to the Okiya?
- What was the effect of the war on the Geisha?
- Did the motivation of Mameha seem true?
- In the clips from the movie that we viewed, can you understand the attitude of the woman whose husband frequented the geisha and tea houses? Did you see any similarity to this cultural attitude to the family depicted in Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Palace Walk* which we read a year ago or so?



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