

Book Club Discussion Questions

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet by Jamie Ford

Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 14, 2011 at 6:30 p.m.

1. Why do you think *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* was told in flashbacks? What perspective can an older Henry give?
2. Father-son relationships are a crucial theme in the novel. For example, how is the relationship between Henry and his father different from that between Henry and Marty? How is it the same?
3. Why doesn't Henry's father want him to speak Cantonese at home? How does this square with the "I am Chinese button"? Or with the father's desire to send Henry back to China for school?
4. If you were Henry, could you forgive your father?
5. Characterize Mrs. Beatty. Did she surprise you? What does this suggest about the assumptions that often guide our judgments of people?
6. What sacrifices do the characters in the novel make in pursuit of their dreams for themselves and for others? Do you think any characters sacrifice too much, or for the wrong reasons? Consider the sacrifices Mr. Okabe makes, for example, and those of Mr. Lee. Both fathers are acting for the sake of their children, yet the results are quite different. Why?
7. Talk about Sheldon's role and that of jazz throughout the story. How are they important?
8. Henry's mother comes from a culture in which wives are subservient to their husbands. Given this background, could she have done more to help Henry in his struggles against his father? Is her loyalty to her husband a betrayal of her son?
9. Does Henry give up on Keiko too easily? What else could he have done to find her? What about Keiko? Why didn't she make more of an effort to see Henry once she was released from the camp?
10. Do you think Ethel might have known what was happening with Henry's letters?
11. The book ends with Henry and Keiko meeting again after more than forty years. What do you think happened after the end of the novel?
12. Should the men and women of Japanese ancestry rounded up by the US during the war have protested more actively against the loss of their property and liberty? Remember that most were eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the US. What would you have done in their place? What's to prevent something like this from ever happening again?