
Kennebecasis Public Library – Book Club Program

Librarian: Madaline Boutilier

Email: Madaline.boutilier@gnb.ca **Phone:** (506) 849-5314 and ask for her.

Please let Kirstin know which book(s) are selected so she can contact Madaline to reserve the book(s) the club wants to read next.

Date of next meeting: **Thursday, September 26, at 1:30PM**

Lady Tan's Circle of Women, by Lisa See

About the Author: Lisa See is the New York Times bestselling author. She is also the author of *On Gold Mountain*, which tells the story of her Chinese American family's settlement in Los Angeles. See was the recipient of the Golden Spike Award from the Chinese Historical Association of Southern California and the Historymaker's Award from the Chinese American Museum. She was also named National Woman of the Year by the Organization of Chinese American Women.

A) Here are 13 discussion questions to help kick-off discussion. Members can take turns reading the question aloud.

1. The opening of this novel begins with a preface which includes the line "My cousin has excelled at treating women because she has shared in the losses and joys of what it means to be a female on this earth." How does this set up the novel and what is to come for Yunxian? After reading the novel, what does it mean to be a "female on this earth?"
2. How does the death of Respectful Lady shape Yunxian? What lessons from Respectful Lady does Yunxian carry with her? When Respectful Lady is near her end, she mutters: "To live is to suffer." How is this a warning for Yunxian early in the novel?
3. Grandfather Tan and Grandmother Ru have very different ideas about childbirth. Who do you agree with, and why? Although 500 years have passed since the time the novel takes place, do you think these contradictory ideas still hold true today – not just for childbirth but for women's medical care in general?
4. Lisa often writes about friendship: Snow Flower and Lily in *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, Youngsook and Mija in *The Island of Sea Women*, and now Yunxian and Meiling in *Lady Tan's Circle of Women*. These two girls shouldn't have contact with each other, let alone have a relationship formalized and sanctioned

by Grandmother Ru and Midwife Shi. How do Yunxian and Meiling each benefit from the relationship? Are there downsides for each of them? Talk about what friendship means to you. And, since you're all in a book club—typically a circle of women—share what it means to you.

5. Each character—and Yunxian's relationship to that person—changes and evolves over time. How does Yunxian come to see and understand the characters of Miss Zhao, Miss Chen, Lady Kuo, Doctor Wong, and her husband and father?
6. The importance of having a son was critical in ancient China. It still is in many countries and cultures around the world. What are the main plotlines in the novel related to this issue? Consider the perspectives of Spinster Aunt, Miss Chen, Doctor Wong, Midwife Shi, Lady Kuo, and Meiling and Yunxian. Were these characters out for his or her own self-interest?
7. Lisa often uses aphorisms to help illuminate a character or a plot. One of the most significant in this novel is No mud, no lotus. Discuss how this aphorism is important to the story. On page 256, Miss Chen recites a series of aphorisms to Yunxian: It takes a lifetime to make a friend, but you can lose one in an hour. Life without a friend is life without sun. Life without a friend is death. What message is Miss Chen trying to convey to Yunxian? Lisa considers these aphorisms to be true across time and cultures. Do you agree? How have they played out in your life, if at all?
8. A case could be made that Yunxian was a modern woman. What are some of the ways she balances work and family? Do you see yourself in her?
9. The Dragon Boat Festival looms large in Yunxian's imagination. What does it mean for her—and the other women who reside in the Garden of Fragrant Delights—to finally get to attend?
10. Lisa was inspired to write this novel during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, walking past her bookshelf to find a text she had but hadn't read in the decade that she owned it. How does time and memory inspire us to examine neglected objects? Have you experienced newfound inspiration or ideas by the objects around your home?

B) Book questions and discussion from Book Club Members.

C) Discussion and choosing of the next book to read (by popular vote).

- September: The Paris Daughter, by Kristin Harmel
 - October: The Good Daughters, by Joyce Maynard
-