

Book Club Discussion Prep: *How Much of These Hills is Gold* by C. Pam Zhang, Western

Book Club members: Megan, Chris, Isaac, Bella

Bella's Notes:

- A brief overview of the book
 - Orphaned and left alone, Lucy and Sam trudge across the American West in search of a proper burial site for their father. As their journey unfolds, the story of their family's trip to America, their father's desire for gold, mother's hunger for more, and the tragedies that fall around them create a picture of the American West and all that is consumed in the desperate quest to find a place to call home.
- Brief author/illustrator background
 - C. Pam Zhang was born in Beijing, China, and came to the U.S. when she was four. *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* is her debut novel. She came up with the story after waking up with the first sentence in her head. It's partially inspired by Zhang's childhood life of moving around the country. She has another novel that she notes "will never see the light of day."
- Open-ended discussion questions (5-7)
 - What are your thoughts on the narrator switching midway through the book?
 - What are your thoughts on Ma's choice to leave the family?
 - How did the constructed story of Ba's life impact his relationship with Ma, Lucy, and Sam?
 - Though he swore to not lie to her again, secrets make up so much of the relationships between each family member; how did those secrets impact the strength of each relationship?

- What does Lucy and Anna's relationship reveal about performative allyship?
 - Was Lucy really Anna's friend?
- Sam's relationship to gender is explored throughout the novel. In trying to find a place to call home, how does Sam's relationship with gender and Lucy's relationship with Sam impact the story?
- Violence lurks around the perimeter of the story. How does violence influence Lucy and Sam's journey to find a place to call home?
- Brief descriptions of read-alikes (3)
 - *The Thirty Names of Night* by Zeyn Joukhadar (May 2020)
 - The story follows an unnamed narrator as he discovers long-buried secrets that echo throughout three generations of his Syrian American family. Like *How Much of These Hills Is Gold*, this is a lyrical tale that examines a character looking for belonging.
 - *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* by Tom Lin (Jun 2021)
 - *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* is a western following a Chinese assassin on his quest for vengeance following the kidnapping of his wife and his false imprisonment and forced labor. With prose imbued with magical realism, *The Thousand Crimes of Ming Tsu* tells a tale of Westward expansion through the eyes of an orphan man who is the son of Chinese immigrants and seeks to make his own place in the world.
 - *In Calamity's Wake* by Natalee Caple (Sep 2013)

- To honor her late adoptive father's wish, Miette goes off to search for her mother, Calamity Jane, meeting a wide variety of people in her journey to reunite with the mother that left her behind.
- BONUS (1 pt)-Prepare something interesting or unusual that you found out about the book/author/publication/setting/topic/history, etc.
 - C. Pam Zhang listened to a "three-hour clip of thunderstorm sounds" while writing How Much of These Hills Is Gold. She explained, "Any songs with lyrics were too distracting because they got in the way of the rhythm of the language. Almost anything with rhythm and shape was too distracting. I needed epicness and crashing sounds and largeness, so I just listened to thunderstorm sounds on repeat. The sound of hundreds and hundreds of thunderstorms was the soundtrack for this novel."