

## Thousand Pieces of Gold Discussion Questions

We are a nation of immigrants. Tell us briefly about one of the immigrants in your family. Where were they from and when did they arrive in the U.S.?

Lalu's feet were deformed by being bound when she was a young child. When she arrives in Idaho, she is surprised she is expected to wear a corset, binding her waist. Many modern American women still wear high heels that restrict their ability to walk and can eventually cause foot deformities. How are these practices alike or different from each other? Why do you think people do these things?

What role do Lalu's determination and courage play in surviving abduction and enslavement? How does the mistreatment she experiences in China compare to the mistreatment she experiences in America?

The madam in Shanghai says "Look at that bamboo. It's strong, but it bends in the wind, just as you must do." To what extent does Lalu/Polly learn to "bend in the wind."

Jim tells Polly, "Your family means everything to you. But you're dead to them." Polly argues that she's not heard from them because her letters might have been lost or her parents are dead or have become landless refugees. Why do you think Jim is so insistent that she accept that she is dead to them?

Jim, although a good marksman, doesn't carry a gun in Warrens. The hurdy gurdy girl, who advised Polly to arm herself, does. How do you think the people in Warrens would react if Polly had shot Hong King? What would happen to her?

Jim speaks English fluently. He dresses and works as a Westerner. Though fully acculturated, he was not and never could be assimilated. Why? Would that still be the case today?

By the 1890 Fourth of July celebrations, Polly appears very much a part of Warrens. Does she belong? Or is she an outsider? In what ways is each true? Is she appropriately or overly cautious in refusing to have children with Charlie? In what other ways does Lalu show that she is aware of the limitations she faces? To what degree does she loosen her ties with her Chinese background?

Charlie wins Polly from Hong King at poker. She is furious because she doesn't want to belong to any man. Then she learns that due to legal and social restrictions directed at Chinese, she needs a "China herder" to fulfill her plans to operate her own business.

Although Charlie and Polly marry to prevent her deportation, the two are clearly devoted to each other. How do Polly and Charlie demonstrate their love for each other?

After Polly learns slavery is against the law in America, she excuses everybody's silence except Charlie's. In your opinion, was anyone's silence justified? Did their silence make them complicit in her enslavement? Why did the Black man speak out?

How realistic did you find the portrait of race relations in a small, yet polarized American community? How about the role of women in a largely male community? What would it feel like to be a minority in a similar situation?

What meanings do you think apply to the title, "Thousand Pieces of Gold." Do you think it is an appropriate title for this book?

The Gold Mountains they had described was not the America she would know. This: the dingy basement room, the blank faces of women and girls stripped of hope, the splintered boards beneath her feet, the auction block. This was her America." This small passage touches upon the idea of the 'American Dream' and how reality is often very different than immigrants imagined it to be. Do you think immigrants still experience these same feelings in America today?

Has anyone visited Angel Island or any other historic sites associated with Chinese in the early west?