

DIY DISCUSSION GUIDE

MAKE YOUR ONE BOOK, ONE COMMUNITY DISCUSSION A BIG SUCCESS

First time leading a book discussion? Have you led book discussions but are looking for some ideas to breathe new life into your group? We have some tips to help make your discussion of *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee a success with this Do It Yourself Discussion Guide.

- **Make it fun.** Meet somewhere that's comfortable for everyone. Keep it casual by enjoying food and drinks while you discuss.
- **Help newcomers feel comfortable and welcome.** Be sure everyone knows each other's name, and spend a few minutes getting to know one another before delving into the book.
- **Go off-script.** Feel free to skip questions or ask them in a different order based on the members of your group and how you think they'll participate. If your group was really interested in one aspect of the book, feel free to focus on that. Ask your own questions to dive deeper and let other members ask questions, too.
- **Pause.** Be sure to give members time to think and answer before you jump in with your own answer to every question.
- **Be respectful of different opinions, responses and reactions to the book.** Diverse viewpoints make the discussion more interesting and rich.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. On a scale of 1-4 stars, how many stars would you give *Pachinko* and why?
2. What word or phrase do you think best describes the book? Feel free to expand.
3. The novel's opening sentence reads, "History has failed us, but no matter." How does the opening line reflect the rest of the book? Why do you think Min Jin Lee chose to begin the book this way?
4. Talk about the thematic significance of the book's title. Pachinko is a slot/pinball game played throughout Japan, and its arcades are also a way to find work and accumulate money. Why do you think the author chose *Pachinko* for the title?
5. Discuss the theme of belonging. How does where one "belongs" tie into self-identity? Consider Mozasu and his son, Solomon. In what ways are their experiences similar when it comes to national identity? How do both of them feel toward the Japanese?
6. How is World War II viewed in this novel - especially from the perspective of the various characters living in Japan? Has reading about the war through their eyes altered your own understanding of the war?
7. Are there characters you were drawn to more than others? If so, who and why?
8. How would you describe Sunja and Isak? How do their differing innate talents complement one another and enable them to survive in Japan? How does Lee redefine intimacy and love with these two characters?
9. Compare Noa's biological and adoptive fathers, Hansu and Isak. What qualities does each try to foster in Noa, and why? Whom does Noa most resemble?
10. What kinds of bravery are shown by different characters, and what motivates this bravery?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT.)

11. What does “home” mean to each of the main characters? Does it ever change? In what ways does a yearning for home color the tone of the novel?
12. How do courting and marriage alter from one generation to the next?
13. Sunja tells Noa that “Blood doesn’t matter.” Do you agree? What parts of the novel support or weaken Sunja’s claim?
14. Yangjin and Kyunghee agree that “A woman’s lot is to suffer.” Do you think the women suffer more than the men in this book? If so, in what ways? How does the suffering of Sunja and Kyunghee compare to that of Yoseb? Noa and Mozasu’s?
15. Much is made of Sunja’s fading beauty, as well as the physical appearance of all the women who surround her. What does this reveal about society at this time? Do you see this emphasis on female beauty reflected in present-day culture?
16. Many of the main characters struggle with shame throughout their lives, whether due to their ethnicity, family, life choices or other factors. How does shame drive both their successes and failures?
17. *Pachinko* begins with the family of a humble fisherman that gains wealth and success. What were the ways in which the family managed to not only survive, but also eventually thrive? What is the relationship among money, race, power and class?
18. Compare the many parent-child relationships in the novel. How do they differ across families and generations? What hopes and dreams does each parent hold for their children, and are these hopes rewarded?

READ ON

Min Jin Lee’s other novel is:

- *Free Food for Millionaires* (2007)

If you enjoyed *Pachinko*, you may also like:

- *The Japanese Lover* by Isabel Allende (2015)
- *White Chrysanthemum* by Mary Lynn Bracht (2018)
- *Ashes of Fiery Weather* by Kathleen Donohue (2016)
- *If You Leave Me* by Crystal Hana Kim (2018)
- *The Kinship of Secrets* by Eugenia Kim (2018)
- *The Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka (2011)
- *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See (2019)

QUESTIONS?

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