

GOOP BOOK CLUB

A Reading Guide for *How Much of These Hills Is Gold* by C Pam Zhang

Sure, you might get made fun of if you underline your books. But we like being able to look back at the passages, scenes, words, quotes, and turns in a story that affected us. And we like being able to talk about them with you. Let us know what you think in our new [book club Facebook group](#).

1. Lucy, thinking about Sam (7): “Young enough to think desire alone shapes the world.” What was each character’s relationship to desire? How did Lucy, Sam, Ma, and Ba act upon or turn away from their desires?
2. Lucy, reflecting on Ba (12): “That body is three and half years empty of the man it once held.” The first section of the book is visceral and physical. What did you make of Lucy’s feelings toward Ba’s body and what was proposed as the right and wrong way to honor the dead?
3. After an altercation at school (15): “Was it braver to move loud or to stand quiet as Lucy did, letting spittle run down her lowered face?” What did Sam and Lucy learn from an early age about what it means to be brave?
4. Sam to Lucy (34): “‘You left,’ Sam spits out between a string of curses, and Lucy understands. She broke the unspoken contract of their lives. Always it’s been Sam who ranges wide while Lucy sat, waiting. Sam’s never been left behind.” Do you think any of the characters were able to change or break out of the roles they had grown accustomed to one another playing in their family?
5. Ma to Lucy (105): “Ni zhang da le. Old enough to know what’s a lie, and what’s better left unsaid. Remember I taught you about burying? Well, sometimes truth needs burying too.” What was Ma’s truth? What did you make of her character and how did that change as you learned more about her?

6. Lucy, in reflection (122): “Easier to dismiss all Ba’s tales as tall ones—because believe, and where does it end? If she believes that tigers live, then does she believe that Indians are hunted and dying? If she believes in fish the size of men, does she believe in men who string up others like linefuls of catch?” Why was it hard for Lucy to believe Ba and so much easier for Sam to believe him? What was Lucy afraid of? And did you believe Ba?
7. Ba (174): “Even if there comes a day when I’m no more than a wind roaming these hills, then I expect that wind will still remember one thing and whisper it to every blade of grass: the way I felt when your ma looked only at me. So bright a lesser man might fear it.” Part three of the book shifts to Ba’s perspective and tells, in part, the story of his life’s great love. How did hearing from him affect the way you thought of him and Ma and the roles they played in their family? And why do you think Zhang chose not to share Ma’s side of this particular story?
8. Ba (180): “What moves in the heads of these people each time they look at us and size us up, what makes them decide on one day to call us chink and the next day to let us pass, and some days to offer charity? I don’t rightly know, Lucy girl. Never figured it out.” In what ways was this a story about race? What do you think Zhang was trying to accomplish by reimagining the history of the American West through the eyes of this family?
9. Ba (182): “Got no flesh and rightly I shouldn’t hurt, but rememory hurts me.” Zhang’s writing is so inventive throughout. How is she playing with language here—what does “rememory” mean in the context of the story?
10. Ba (184): “A question that’s followed me for years, Lucy girl, is this: can you love a person and hate them all at once? I think so. I think so.” Was this true for any of characters? Do you believe you can?
11. Sam (213): “‘Those gold men really think this land belongs to them,’ Sam says, scornful. ‘Isn’t that the greatest joke?’” Were you surprised by Lucy’s relationship with Anna? How did this section introduce additional issues of class to the story?
12. Lucy, in reflection, while with Sam (230): “The best thing about stars is that you can see in them any shape you want. Make any story. Better, even, when the person beside you doesn’t see them the same way.” So much of the novel explores perception, the ways we create and shape our realities, and what separates truths,

lies, and secrets. (Earlier, Ba suggests that the kinder word for “lie” is “secret.”) Did you trust the narrative? Did you ever find yourself questioning what was real and what was imagined?

13. Lucy, in reflection (236): “There is, she is coming to see, a place that exists between the world Ba pursued and the world Ma wanted. His a lost world, doomed to make the present and future dim in comparison. Hers so narrow it could accommodate only one place. A place Lucy and Sam might arrive at together. Almost a new kind of land.” How did each of the characters define home? Do you think any of them ultimately found it?
14. Lucy, traveling with Sam (245): “Across the ocean the people will look like them, but they won’t know the shapes of these hills, or the sougning of grass, or the taste of muddy water—all these things that shape Lucy within as her eyes and nose shape her without.” What is Zhang saying about identity and the things that shape who we are and where we belong in the world?
15. Lucy, in reflection (272): “There is claiming the land, which Ba wanted to do, which Sam refused—and then there is being claimed by it. The quiet way. A kind of gift in never knowing how much of these hills might be gold.” In what ways does this book challenge our relationship to nature and our insistence on control? What does it suggest about accepting mystery and surrendering to something greater than us?