

A MAGIC STEEPED IN POISON

DISCUSSION GUIDE

About the Book

I used to look at my hands with pride. Now all I can think is, "These are the hands that buried my mother."

For Ning, the only thing worse than losing her mother is knowing that it's her own fault. She was the one who unknowingly brewed the poison tea that killed her—the poison tea that now threatens to also take her sister, Shu.

When Ning hears of a competition to find the kingdom's greatest shénnóng-shī—masters of the ancient and magical art of tea-making—she travels to the imperial city to compete. The winner will receive a favor from the princess, which may be Ning's only chance to save her sister's life.

But between the backstabbing competitors, bloody court politics, and a mysterious (and handsome) boy with a shocking secret, Ning might actually be the one in more danger.



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About the Author



Judy I. Lin, #1 New York Times-bestselling author of the Book of Tea duology (*A Magic Steeped in Poison* and *A Venom Dark and Sweet*), was born in Taiwan and immigrated to Canada with her family at a young age. She grew up with her nose in a book and loved to escape to imaginary worlds. She now works as an occupational therapist and still spends her nights dreaming up imaginary worlds of her own. She lives on the Canadian prairies with her husband and daughters.

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Discussion Questions

1. In the beginning of *A Magic Steeped in Poison*, we learn “the true wielders of Shénnóng magic have their unique specialties. Some brew teas for emotions – compassion, hope, love. Others are able to imbue the body with energy or encourage the drinker to remember something long thought lost.” If you are a wielder of tea magic, what sort of magic would you hope to specialize in? Why?
2. Ning’s connection with her family, especially her sister Shu, motivates her even while she encounters challenges in her journey. How is her relationship with her various family members described in the book? How did her time spent in the palace affect her perception of her family?
3. There are many different types of interactions with women of all ages portrayed in *A Magic Steeped in Poison*. How do these women help or hinder Ning’s journey?
4. Who is your favorite character in *A Magic Steeped in Poison*? Why? Is there something about yourself that you find relatable to this character?
5. A theme within the story is about how people’s initial appearances can be deceiving, and how our impressions of them may change after several interactions. Which characters within the text are not as they initially appear? And how does Ning’s view of them change as the story progresses?
6. In Chapter 9, Ning discovers the Banished Prince is a recent figure in history and not “scattered bones in a river” as she believed. How is the influence of the Banished Prince felt in the court and the palace?
7. In Chapter 22, Ning and Kang discover a commonality in their background within the temple. How is the suffering of the people of Lùzhōu similar to the difficulties encountered by the residents of Sù? How do they differ in the ways they approach the princess to try and help people in need?
8. In the third round of the competition, the phrase “fight poison with poison” is repeated. How does this assist Ning in resolving the challenge presented in this round of the competition? Can you describe a real world example in science or medicine that this phrase can be applied to?

The Magical World of Dàxī

1. Explore how tea making utilizes all five senses and how to apply the senses to Shénnóng magic.
2. Food and the cooking of food are described in vivid detail in the novel.
 - How does climate, availability of resources and/or access to transport influence some of the dishes described in the story?
 - Consider the food(s) your city / region is known for. Why do you think that is a specialty and is its popularity related to any of the above factors mentioned?
3. The author stated through interviews that the kingdom of Dàxī is loosely inspired by the Song dynasty.
 - In the Song dynasty, the appreciation of the “Three Perfections”: poetry, calligraphy and painting are important in their society. Pick one of these art forms and investigate how they were influential in Song dynasty culture.
 - Who is a famous Song dynasty poet? Look up a translation of one of their poems.
4. Animal imagery is often used to depict different characteristics in people, objects, or magic. What or who do some of these animals represent in the story and why are these characteristics significant?