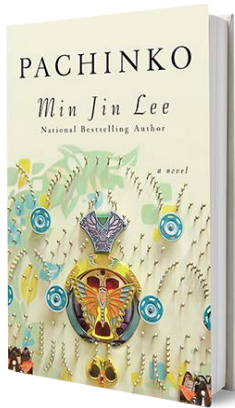


Pachinko

Discussion Questions



Author: Min Jin Lee
Originally published:
February 7, 2017
Genre: Historical Fiction,
Domestic fiction

1. The novel's opening sentence reads, "History has failed us, but no matter." What does the sentence mean, and what expectations might it establish for the reader? Why the tail end of the sentence, "but no matter"?
2. Talk about the thematic significance of the book's title. Pachinko is a sort of slot/pinball game played throughout Japan, and its arcades are also a way for foreigners to find work and accumulate money.
3. What are the cultural differences between Korea and Japan?
4. As "Zainichi," non-Japanese, how are Koreans treated in Japan? What rules must they adhere to, and what restrictions apply to them?
5. *Follow-up to Questions 3 and 4:* Discuss the theme of belonging, which is pervasive in this novel. 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. How would you describe Sunja and Isak. How do their differing innate talents complement one another and enable them to survive in Japan?
8. Are there particular characters you were drawn to more than others, perhaps even those who are morally compromised? If so who...and why?

Author Bio

- Birth: 1968, Seoul, South Korea; Raised: Borough of Queens, New York
- Education: B.A., Yale University; J.D., Georgetown University
- Currently: Lives in New York, NY

Min Jin Lee is a Korean-American writer and author, whose work frequently deals with Korean American topics. Her first novel, *Free Food for Millionaires*, was published in 2007 and her second, *Pachinko*, in 2017. Both were highly regarded. Lee also served for three years seasons as a "Morning Forum" English-language columnist of South Korea's newspaper *Chosun Ilbo*.

Background

Although Lee was born in Seoul, South Korea, her family came to the United States in 1976 when she was seven. She grew up in Elmhurst, Queens, New York, where her parents owned a wholesale jewelry store. She studied history at Yale and law at Georgetown University. She worked as a corporate lawyer in New York for several years before becoming a writer. She lived in Japan for four years (2007-11) and now lives in New York with her husband, Christopher Duffy, and her son, who is half-Japanese.

Lee has lectured about writing, literature, and politics at Columbia, Tufts, Loyola Marymount University, Stanford, Johns Hopkins (SAIS), University of Connecticut, Boston College, Hamilton College, Harvard Law School, Yale University, Ewha University, Waseda University, the American School in Japan. She has also lectured at World Women's Forum, the Tokyo American Center of the U.S. Embassy, and the Asia Society in New York, San Francisco and Hong Kong.

Writing and awards

Lee's short story "Axis of Happiness" won the 2004 Narrative Prize from *Narrative Magazine*. Another short story, "Motherland," published in the *Missouri Review*, won The Peden Prize for Best Short Story. The story is about a Korean family living in Japan, which is also the subject of her second novel, *Pachinko* (2017). Her short stories have been featured on NPR's *Selected Shorts*.

Her 2007 novel *Free Food for Millionaires* was named one of the Top 10 Novels of the Year by *The Times* (UK), NPR's *Fresh Air*, and *USA Today*. It was listed as a notable novel by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and as a *New York Times* Editor's Choice. Lee's second novel, *Pachinko*, came out in 2017.

Lee has also published non-fiction in anthologies and such periodicals as *The Times* (UK), *New York Times Magazine*, *Traveler*, *Vogue*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Food & Wine*. Further, she has published a number of reviews, among them, Toni Morrison's *Home*, Cynthia Ozick's *Foreign Bodies*, and Jodi Picoult's *Wonder Woman: Love and Murder*. All three appeared in *The Times*(UK).

She received the NYFA (New York Foundation for the Arts) Fellowship for Fiction, the Peden Prize for Best Story from the *Missouri Review*, and the *Narrative Magazine* Prize for New and Emerging Writer.

While at Yale, she was awarded both the Henry Wright Prize for Nonfiction and the James Ashmun Veech Prize for Fiction. (Adapted from Wikipedia. Retrieved 2/15/2017)