Warning: these questions contain spoilers for the plot!

Salem Public Library Book Club Discussion Questions
Snow Flower and the Secret Fan by Lisa See

1. In your opinion, is Lily (the narrator) the heroine or the villain? What are her flaws and her strengths?

2. Having a wife with bound feet was a status symbol for men, and, consequently, having bound feet increased a woman's chances of marriage into a wealthier household. Women took great pride in their feet, which were considered not only beautiful but also their best and most important feature. As a child, would you have fought against having your feet bound, as Third Sister did, knowing you would be consigned to the life of a servant or a "little daughter-in-law"? As a mother, would you have chosen to bind your daughter's feet?

3. Did See's descriptions of footbinding remind you of any Western traditions?

4. Some men in nineteenth-century China apparently knew about nu shu, the secret women's writing described in Snow Flower. Why do you think they tolerated such private communication?

5. Do you think the concept of "old sames" exists today? Do you have an "old same," or are you part of a sworn sisterhood? In what ways are those relationships similar or different from the ones in nineteenth-century China?

6. Reflecting on her first few decades, Lily seems to think her friendship with Snow Flower brought her more good than harm. Do you agree?

7. The Chinese character for "mother love" consists of two parts: one meaning "pain," the other meaning "love." In your own experience, from the perspective of a mother or a daughter, is there an element of truth to this description of mother love? Do you think that sort of mother love still exists today?

8. Lily sometimes pulls us out of the present moment to reflect--as an old woman--on her youthful decisions. What does this device add to the story?

9. Do you think Lily's betrayal was an understandable mistake? Did the way she treated Snow Flower change your opinion of her?

10. Lily writes her story so that Snow Flower can read it in the afterworld. Do you think she tells her story in a convincing way so that Snow Flower can forgive and understand? Do you think Snow Flower would have told the story differently?

11. Beautiful Moon's sudden death, the typhoid outbreak and the exile to the mountains weave tragedy throughout the story. How do death and the rituals surrounding it shape the characters and culture? How is that different in our society?

12. Lily defies the wishes of her son in order to pair her grandson with Peony. Does she fully justify her behavior?
13. The book is divided into the stages of a woman's life: Daughter Days, Hair-Pinning Days, Rice-and-Salt Days, and Sitting Quietly. If you were to name the stages of a modern woman's life, what would they be?

These discussion questions are meant as a jumping-off point. Please feel free to come with your own questions and/or comments about the book! Questions, comments or suggestions can be sent to salembookclub@noblenet.org.
(Questions provided by readinggroupguides.com, about.com, and lisasee.com)