

Discussion Questions

1. What is the significance of the memoir's title, *Paper Sons*? In what ways is Lam a paper son?
2. How is Lam's mother portrayed in the book? How would you describe the relationship between Lam and his mother?
3. Lam's father is a primary focus of *Paper Sons*, while Lam's sister seems to be a secondary character. What might be the author's rationale for this? Did Lam inadvertently silence his sister by centering the book on the father, the abuser?
4. Writing is a prominent theme throughout the book, from Lam being a graffiti writer to Lam teaching writing as a high school teacher to the emails written by his father and sister. How has writing shaped Lam? How does the book illustrate the power of writing?
5. *Paper Sons* is organized in short sections. Why might Lam have chosen this structure? How did this affect your reading experience?
6. Think of some common stereotypes of Asian Americans. In what ways does *Paper Sons* challenge these stereotypes?

7. Consider Cynthia Ngewu's statement on the need for forgiveness: "We want to get rid of this burden we are carrying inside, so that we too can feel at peace" (p. 212). How does this statement relate to the section "Bandaged Figures" (pp. 170-175)?
8. "Honesty was a prerequisite for forgiveness," Lam says (p. 211). Do you agree with this idea? Is forgiveness only possible if the abuser shows remorse? Under what conditions should we forgive an abuser? If the abuser denies wrongdoing, is it still possible for the victim to find "peace"?
9. In comparing US immigration policy toward Chinese and Europeans immigrants before the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Lam says, "Citizenship could be extended or withheld, but this choice had nothing to do with notions of legal or illegal; it had everything to do with affirming whiteness" (p. 118). Could this same sentence be applied to the treatment of undocumented immigrants today? Why or why not?
10. Why do you think Lam ended the story the way he did? What does the ending reveal about his current feelings toward his father?