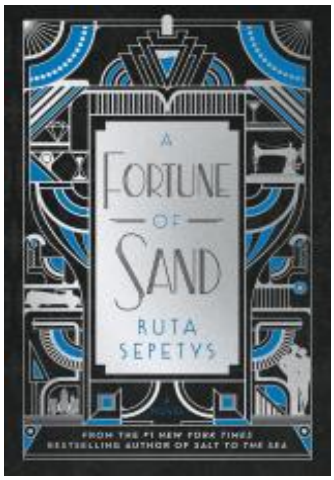
ReadingGroupGuides
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A Fortune of Sand

by Ruta Sepetys



About the Book

The daughter of a powerful tycoon escapes to a glamorous artists? retreat --- where dark secrets and dangerous temptations await --- in this gripping Prohibition-era novel from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of SALT TO THE SEA.

Detroit, 1927. A city of smoke and ambition, where glittering wealth conceals a graveyard of secrets.

Marjorie Lennox is the youngest daughter of a powerful Detroit dynasty --- a family rich in money and poor in charm. Creative, reckless and never quite what they wanted, Marjorie has spent her life overlooked by her controlling father and self-absorbed siblings. But when she secretly applies to an elite arts program backed by a mysterious patron, she grabs the chance to finally step out of her family?s shadow.

The building is grand.

The talent is extraordinary.

And something is deeply wrong.

The program is strict in ways that feel sinister. Doors lock at strange hours. Rumors spread about women going missing. And the handsome benefactor behind it all is as magnetic as he is unsettling. As Marjorie gets pulled deeper into his world, she must fight to discover the truth before she loses herself completely.

Set in the fading splendor of 1920s Detroit and inspired by real, long-buried events, A FORTUNE OF SAND is a glittering, gothic page-turner about power, control, and the price women pay when they demand to be seen.

Discussion Guide

THEME: FACADE VS. REALITY

1. The novel explores the idea that something beautiful on the surface can conceal instability beneath. Where do you see this most clearly --- in the novel and today?

2. How does the metaphor of "sand" function in the story? What does it suggest about legacy, power or truth?

3. Can you think of examples --- past or present --- where a polished exterior concealed a more complicated or unstable reality?

WOMEN, CONTROL & AGENCY

4. The 1920s are often romanticized as a time of liberation. Why do you think this became the dominant narrative of the era? How does the novel challenge that narrative, particularly for women?

5. In what ways do control and autonomy manifest in the lives of the female characters? Who holds power --- and who appears to, but does not?

6. How do societal expectations influence the choices available to women in the story?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

7. Many US cities once had entire neighborhoods built to display wealth and permanence, yet many have disappeared or been transformed. Why do you think societies preserve certain spaces while allowing others to vanish, and what does that reveal about how we remember history?

8. Did the novel change or deepen your understanding of the 1920s? If so, how?

9. What parallels, if any, do you see between the world of the novel and contemporary society?

SECRETS, TRUTH & LEGACY

10. Several characters are shaped by secrets --- either those they keep or those they uncover. What role do secrets play in shaping the narrative?

11. What does the novel suggest about legacy? Is legacy something we inherit, construct or dismantle?

12. Do the Lennox secrets prevent pain or prolong it?

13. How are family status and legacy defined in the US versus the UK and other countries?

14. What does A FORTUNE OF SAND ultimately suggest about the cost of illusion --- and the value of truth?

CHARACTER REFLECTIONS

15. In what ways does Marjorie's wealth both empower and confine her? How does the tension between freedom and control evolve over the course of the novel?

16. How do you interpret Bonafante's character? Does he operate within a moral code, or is he ultimately shaped by the world of power and crime he inhabits?

17. What do you believe drives Graham at his core? Are his actions rooted in ambition, protection, control or something more personal?

18. In what ways does Chet's loss of her mother inform her identity, her vulnerabilities and the choices she makes?

19. Marjorie's friendships with Bernice and Ivy offer glimpses of different paths for women. How did you interpret these relationships, and what do they reveal about belonging, influence and independence?

20. The story of Grandpa Lennox carries an air of ambiguity and myth. What do you imagine may have truly happened in Scotland, and how does that possibility reshape your understanding of the family's legacy?

21. Lilah's actions invite both judgment and empathy. To what extent do you see her behavior as justified, shaped by circumstance, or driven by personal ambition?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

These questions invite personal reflection. Share what feels comfortable.

22. Reflecting on your own ancestry, are there individuals in your family who may have been misunderstood or mischaracterized in their time?

23. In your birthplace or hometown, what are some things that were once vital but have now vanished?

24. How did the women in your family find ways to cope, adapt or survive within the constraints placed upon them? Are there examples of quiet resistance that stand out to you?

25. Have any of your family stories been passed down in fragments or silence --- particularly about women? What do you think was left unsaid, and why?

26. The novel explores how reputation could define and confine a woman's life. Do you know of an ancestor whose reputation, whether accurate or not, shaped her opportunities or relationships?

27. How has our modern understanding of mental health changed the way we interpret the lives of women from earlier generations?

28. If you could ask one female ancestor a question about her life --- particularly about her inner world --- what would you want to know?

Author Bio

Ruta Sepetys is an internationally acclaimed, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of historical fiction published in over 60 countries and 40 languages. Sepetys is considered a ?crossover? novelist, as her books are read by both teens and adults worldwide.

Her novels BETWEEN SHADES OF GRAY, OUT OF THE EASY and SALT TO THE SEA have won or been shortlisted for more than 40 book prizes and are included on more than 60 state award lists. BETWEEN SHADES OF GRAY was adapted into the film Ashes in the Snow, and her other novels are currently in development for TV and film.

Winner of the Carnegie Medal, Ruta is passionate about the power of history and literature to foster global awareness and connectivity. She has presented to NATO, to the European Parliament, in the United States Capitol, and at embassies worldwide. Ruta was born and raised in Michigan and now lives with her family in Nashville, Tennessee.

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