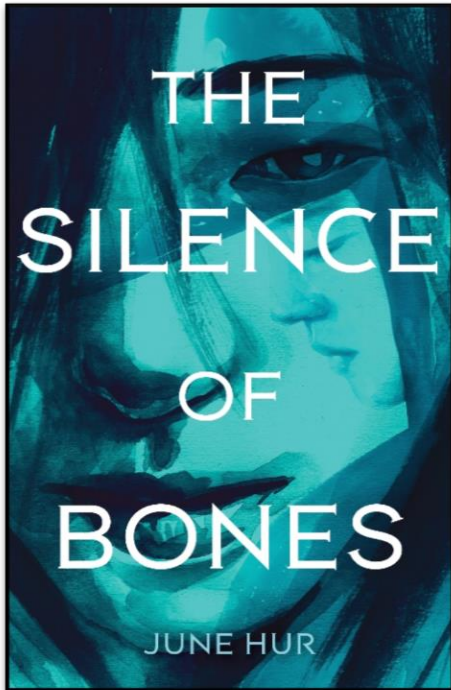


A Reader's Guide to THE SILENCE OF BONES



Age 13 and up • 978125022955 • e-Book 9781250229564

ABOUT THE BOOK

**I have a mouth, but I mustn't speak;
Ears, but I mustn't hear;
Eyes, but I mustn't see.**

1800, Joseon (Korea). Homesick and orphaned sixteen-year-old Seol is living out the ancient curse: “May you live in interesting times.” Indentured to the police bureau, she’s been tasked with assisting a well-respected young inspector with the investigation into the politically charged murder of a noblewoman.

As they delve deeper into the dead woman's secrets, Seol forms an unlikely bond of friendship with the inspector. But her loyalty is tested when he becomes the prime suspect, and Seol may be the only one capable of discovering what truly happened on the night of the murder.

But in a land where silence and obedience are valued above all else, curiosity can be deadly.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JUNE HUR was born in South Korea, raised in Canada, and studied History and Literature at the University of Toronto. She began writing her debut novel, *The Silence of Bones*, after obsessing over books about Joseon Korea. She lives in Toronto with her husband and daughter.

FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader;

THE SILENCE OF BONES is, in part, my love letter to Korean history. I was born in South Korea, but I was raised in Canada, and spent all of my teenage years obsessing over British history and Jane Austen. In short, I grew up knowing almost nothing about Korean history, except for the brief stories my parents shared with me, and the snippets I learned about whenever I managed to stay awake during Korean history class (back when I studied in South Korea).

Then everything changed for me in 2015 when out of sheer curiosity, I read further into Korean history – and fell madly in love with it. I was fascinated by everything and was gripped by a terrifying desperation to write a Korean historical mystery. I hesitated for a while, wondering if I, a Korean-born and Canadian-raised individual, even had the right to write about Korea, and afraid that no one would be interested in a mystery set in a non-western country. It was the We Need Diverse Books movement that finally gave me the courage to write.

At the very heart of this book is a more personal story inspired by my family, a family dispersed. I spent nearly half my life living with my siblings in Canada, far away from my parents, far away from my relatives. And so, while I was writing this book, I found myself wrestling with two questions that always haunted me: What will it cost to keep family together when things are falling apart and everyone is scattered? And where is home when you live far away from those who have loved you for all of your life?

Now that THE SILENCE OF BONES is in your hands, its story no longer belongs to me but to you! I hope this book will introduce you to—or deepen your appreciation for—the complexity, depth and grandeur of Joseon Dynasty Korea. I especially hope that those who are homesick, like I was and still am, will feel less alone.

Sincerely,

June Hur

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the title reveal about the story to follow?
2. Seol shares that “among the seven sins” a woman can commit, one is “talking excessively.” (p. 2) What other rules exist for women in Joseon Dynasty-era Korea? Why do you think these rules exist?
3. Why were damos (female police investigators) so necessary to the police bureau? Do you think police during this period would have functioned without these women?
4. Seol was branded on the cheek for trying to run away. Why do you think the police chose this method of punishment? Do you think brandings and tattoos are different or the same?
5. Seol tries to live by the motto, “I have a mouth, but I mustn’t speak; ears, but I mustn’t hear; eyes, but I mustn’t see.” (p. 11) What does she mean by this? Does she actually live out this saying?
6. Who is Inspector Han? What does Seol think about him? How does her relationship with him change over the course of the story? How is he used in the novel to symbolize Joseon Korea’s anti-Western sentiments?
7. Why does Officer Kyōn dislike Seol so much? Do you think he would have disliked Seol as much if she had been a boy?
8. Describe the ways in which knowledge is withheld from Seol. Are there circumstances in which knowledge should be withheld from individuals? Or do you believe that no knowledge is bad knowledge?
9. Catholics are referred to as “Catholic demons” in the novel (p. 206) Why do you think the Joseon government was so against Catholicism? How does Seol’s understanding of Catholics change over time?
10. Inspector Han says to Seol, “Sometimes betrayal is the deepest expression of love.” (p. 308) Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Talk about how it relates to Seol’s own decision to betray the inspector.

11. Young Master Ch'oi tells Seol, "evil comes from the unfulfilled need for significance." (p. 192) How true do you think this is? Discuss whether significance is something a person is born with, or something that needs to be acquired.
12. What is 'home' to Seol at the beginning of the novel? Does her perception of home change by the end of the book? What is your definition of 'home'?
13. Would you describe Inspector Han as a hero, or an anti-hero? What do you think of the choices he made in life? If you were in his shoe, would you have sought revenge for the death of your parents? Why or why not?
14. What is the significance of Inspector Han's final letter? Why do you think he titled it 'Letter to the dead' rather than 'Letter to the living'?
15. What do you think the future holds for Seol? Will she be able to move on from her personal tragedy? Will she return to the capital or remain with her sister? What kind of woman will she grow up to become?

Pronunciation Guide

Names

Seol – Sul

Soyi – So-yee

Officer **Kyŏn** – K-yun

King **Chŏngjo** – Jung-jo

Priest **Zhou Wenmo** – Joe When-Moe

Young Master **Ch’oi Jinyeop** – Chwe Jeen-yup

Lady **Rhee** – Lady Reeh

Scholar **Hwang** – H-wang

Madam **Yeonok** – Yun-oak

Ryun – R-yun

Uchan – Ooh-chan

Hong **Sunhŭi** – Hong Sun-heu-ee

Places

Tŏksan – Duck-san

Jongno – Joe-ng-no

Hanyang – Han-yang

Inchon – Een-chun

Terms

Paedo – Peh-doh

Palchŏn – Pal-chun

Seoja – Suh-ja

Ilsan bulyong iho – Eel-san bool-yong ee-ho

Injaejikjimaek – Een-jeh-jeek-jeek-mek

Ui-hyung – Uh-ee hyeoung

Further Resources

Books

Jahyun Kim Haboush's *Epistolary Korea: Letters in the Communicative Space of the Chosŏn, 1392–1910*.

Jahyun Kim Haboush's *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea*.

Sun Joo Kim and Jungwon Kim's *Wrongful Deaths: Selected Inquest Records from Nineteenth-Century Korea*.

Yungchung Kim's *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*.

Peter H. Lee's *Sources of Korean Tradition, Vol. 2*.

Moo-Sook Hanh's *Encounter: A Novel of Nineteenth-Century Korea*.

Websites

About the Joseon Dynasty: <http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/History/Joseon>

National Museum of Korea: <https://www.museum.go.kr/site/engm/relic/masterpiece/list>

Arts and Culture of the Joseon Dynasty:

https://www.philamuseum.org/doc_downloads/education/JoseonResourceBook.pdf

Lesson Plans by Time Period in Korean History:

<https://www.koreasociety.org/education/educational-resources/item/617>

The Role of the Joseon Dynasty in Korean History: <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-joseon-dynasty-in-korea-195719>

Historical Korean Dramas

Damo (TV series, 2003)

Tree With Deep Roots (TV series, 2011)

Gunman in Joseon (TV series, 2014)

Yi San (TV series, 2008)

The Throne (Film, 2015)