



The Fifth Book Of Peace

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By the author of the bestselling *The Woman Warrior*, a magical book: a literature of peace built on the stories of war. Divided into four sections - 'Fire', 'Paper', 'Water' and 'Earth' - this book is neither fiction nor autobiography nor memoir, but a unique form of Chinese 'talk-story' in which real and imagined worlds intrude upon and enrich one another. From the anti-war protests in Hawaii to Kingston's own conversations with Vietnam veterans, the author takes us inside the hearts and minds of a host of characters, not least of whom is her own Mama, the veteran woman warrior Brave Orchid. This remarkable book is also the narrative of the seminal years in which Kingston rebuilds her life following a devastating fire, which destroyed all her possessions including her novel *The Fourth Book of Peace*, and the death of her father.

The Fifth Book Of Peace Details

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Author : Maxine Hong Kingston

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From Reader Review *The Fifth Book Of Peace* for online ebook

Maggie says

Interesting combination of fiction and memoir from a Berkeley professor who lost her home in the Berkley/Oakland Hills fire in 1991 as well as the book she was writing at the time - "The Fourth Book of Peace". Here she recreates the history of the original 3 books of Peace, the fictional story of the Fourth Book and her experience working for peace as she conducts writing workshops for veterans and incorporates mindfulness meditation, Buddhist traditions and more.

The vets' writings based on their varying experiences (mostly Vietnam era) are moving as they confront emotional and psychological wounds, each attempting to reconcile with an inner Peace. It rekindled memories I have of friends and family members who were and may remain scarred by those experiences.

A says

Although all of Kingston's books have had an impact on me, this had the greatest. Maybe it's because I grew up in Oakland, and although I didn't live there when the fire happened, the area is familiar to me, as Stockton, where she had been to her father's funeral.

The book is about loss and not really re-birth, but re-finding. She takes a journey with Vietnam Veterans and they all discover something within themselves. It became very emotional for me. Even though I knew people who had been in the war, and some who had died in Vietnam, I felt like an outsider going to college while others were fighting. This brought it all home to me in a way that's hard for me to put in words.

I bought a copy for my local library. It seems like an important book for people to read.

Sharon Villainelle says

This might well be my favorite of Kingston's works, and that's saying a great deal. Her language is simultaneously lyrical and grounded, a perfect weaving for a narrative that is itself a patchwork of truth and fiction. She examines themes of loss and resurrection, peace and turmoil, object and idea. In short, it is a work that examines the space where oppositions come together to create life.

Ruth says

I am developing a mental category for lesser books of great writers. It made me want to go back and read *The Woman Warrior* and *Tripmaster Monkey*. Well, the beginning of the book made me want to go back and read more of Maxine Hong Kingston. The second and third sections weren't as strong. The first part is Kingston's memoir of losing her house to a terrible fire right as she was coming back from funeral rituals for her father. It was strongly emotional writing, full of word play. The second section of the book was an attempt to reconstruct a manuscript she lost in the fire. The third section was about her activism creating

writing workshops for Vietnam veterans. The second two sections felt like notes for a book rather than like two books. They also made me love Kingston even more, because the problem with them was how she was trying to capture every individual person's story.

Leigh says

One section of this is fictional and takes place in Hawaii during the Vietnam War. The rest is non-fiction and discusses ideas of peace, community and loss. She talks about the loss of her house and manuscript to a fire in Oakland. Also her involvement with a combination creative writing and meditation workshop with Vietnam veterans. Her writing is so different - fragmented and trippy, but still graceful and powerful.

Jennifer says

This is a book about war and peace and loss. I'd read other books by this author and saw this one, which starts out with her losing the novel she'd been writing. Her house burned down, her whole neighborhood burned down. The book is about the fire and the process of rewriting the lost book, with the rewritten book included. The writing has magical elements. It's a really compelling book that made me think a lot about war and peace and what it means to have peace, especially when you have been at war.

Janet says

I thought I would enjoy this book more than I did, but it began to feel so much like a vanity piece that I put it aside and read something else for a week. Just reading the first chapter was such a slog, I am doing something I rarely do and that is to give up on it.

Parag says

I have stories to tell about this book, which I'll spare for now. But I found this book for \$1 on the shelves of a bookstore in the Poconos, bought a few copies, and have dispersed them hence. There's something about the combination of fiction and non-fiction in this particular book, from the story of how Kingston lost the book she was writing in the flames of the Oakland fire that consumed her house to how she was coping with her father's death before that...

And I think the way she was able to work with veterans in writing workshops where they explored whatever they felt like exploring was incredible - there was something about this book that really touched me in many ways. I still think that **Tripmaster Monkey** was her best, and perhaps that's because her fiction glides a bit more than her non-fiction in places, but her writing is top-notch in this book, and its many stories overlap in a way that's altogether compelling.

David says

So far, not bad. I have been a Kingston fan ever since *The Woman Warrior*, and in this newest book she still straddles that terrifyingly blurry line between fiction and nonfiction. Her narrator tends to wander to and from matters of her family, literature, opposition the 1991 Gulf War...but the writing is strong, literary and engaging. I look forward to seeing where she goes with this.

Helen says

The Fifth Book of Peace is split into four parts, Fire, Paper, Water, and Earth. The first two sections and the last chronicle Kingston's journey from her house burning down with her unfinished manuscript for a novel entitled the Fifth Book of Peace, and how this loss inspired her to create a writer's workshop for war veterans, specifically of the Vietnam War, to write their own books of peace. These are great, the writing is interesting, the stories of the devastating loss of Maxine's home and those of the vets are interesting, compelling, and heartbreaking.

The Water section is a short recreation of the manuscript that was lost. This isn't so great, and I'm not sure why the author included it. The characters are for the most part unsympathetic and whiny, you are never sure if she intends them to be a satire of the peace movement, or if she genuinely feels the way that they do. The timeline isn't very clear, one day will pass, then another scene will pick up that must be months later, but there isn't a clear delineation, it's written as if it's the very next day.

The fiction is disappointing, but the memoir is full of hope. Read Fire Paper and Earth, skip the Water.

Darceylaine says

This book is really 3 books
the book of how she lost her book in the Oakland Fire
the book re-written (our heroes from Tripmaster Monkey)
and the book of her work with veterans.

She is very wise and her brain works in some of the strange ways mine does, and my friends and colleagues from the Bay Area. But sadly she writes in one long constant steady rhythm that lulls me to sleep and makes it hard to finish all 400 pages. I'm always glad when I read a chunk, but I have been reading it off and on for a couple of years now, and just can't seem to finish.

Still not quite finished- put it back on the shelf though. So much good stuff in there, but hard to get the energy to read it through to the end.

Susan Emmet says

Reread this book after years away from it. I so liked *The Woman Warrior* and this novel/memoir is one fine book, too.

Kingston takes readers into the loss of her home in Oakland CA, prey to a huge wildfire. She tries to recover treasured family items, as well as the draft of *The Fourth Book of Peace*, to little avail. A professor at Berkeley, she finds some comfort in friends and family, but is determined to find the Book of Peace. The next segment traces the journey of the the Ah Sing family (Tana, Wittman and son Mario) from CA to Hawaii to avoid the draft. There they seek peace living a life of giving poverty, art, writing and trying to find ways for Vietnam veterans to find peace. They try to help create sanctuary for soldiers. Results are a mixed bag.

The last part tracks Kingston's plan to regularly gather veterans from Vietnam and America - and writers and activists - in CA, NYC and France- to explore ways to let violent pasts go in a positive, helpful way by bonding together in peace and Buddhist meditation. This effort works well for men and women who remained true to the group and its teachings.

Maxine Hong Kingston, with her husband Earll Kingston, stay true to their beliefs in firm pacifism.

Tia says

I couldn't finish this book. That's a first for me. Maybe in a time when I can enjoy it somewhere other than the Metro, I'll reread it; but I'm not promising anything.

This is a journey. It's more than the book Kingston lost in a fire. The reader gets the rewritten version of her lost text - a family moving to Hawaii in order to avoid the draft. Two artists raising their child to love and not fight, and they are surprised by their "welcoming" and stay. I assume the chapters following "Water" explore the importance of the text and significance of a book of peace - what it means on a personal level. My guesses probably make me an ignorant and impatient reader, though.

Kingston's sentences are simple but deliberate. She writes to create an image in the reader's mind. Her style is a mixture of Asian, European, and American writing; the writing itself is forward and explanatory, while the style is personal.

As a predominantly contemporary American reader attempting to expand her range, I knew this was different than anything I've read. At best, I've read straightforward English, Indian, and Chinese fiction, and I thought I could hack it. This requires more than looking at words and enjoying language or a story. Kingston is an experienced writer who knows how to explore multiple realms of writing to create metaphorical depth, understanding in her reader, and a solid story.

Jenny Shipp says

This book just took me in. It starts out with the fire in the Oakland Hills. She is coming home from her father's funeral and finds the hills and her home on fire. she loses the first hundred or so pages of a book she was writing. the middle of the book is her attempt to recreate that story. the rest of the book is about a writing group she begins for veterans of war. It is moving and much of it is what she says about writing, and going deeper and healing. AND she talks about being "Eldest Sister" and what it means in chinese culture. Suddenly, the "lucy" bossy sister person in be fell into place. I AM Eldest Sister. It means something. It felt right and I can't define it. But, I like my bossy self better for it (within moderation...)And I liked reading about how she sees things differently as she gets older. The book just took me in, I was supposed to read it.

Lanie says

I met Maxine at a post-play party and a few days later, while taking shelter from the pouring rain in the SF public library, this book seemed to jump off the shelf. It was the perfect time in my life to find the book.

She was working on the "4th Book of Peace" for years, and then the entire manuscript was burned in the Oakland fires. The first chapter, her description of running through the hills, trying to save her book, is impossible to put down. It's incredibly poignant and I think speaks volumes to me about loss, what is important in life, transitions, letting go.

Another section of the book is her attempt at re-creating the "4th Book of Peace," a work of fiction about a family moving to Hawaii to dodge the draft in the 60s. It's incredibly lyrical, lush and beautiful, and incorporates a lot of elements of magical realism.

I skipped ahead to the last section, too (so I could read about some of the people I was going to meet at a post-play discussion)--true story about her starting a writing group for war veterans (most of whom had no previous writing experience). Equally riveting.

Maxine Hong Kingston can write fiction and non-fiction amazingly well. I love how each of her seemingly disjointed stories fits together in the end in this book. And she tackles relevant issues with grace and a constant tone that invites the reader to explore the depths of her own experience.

Angela says

I am calling it read but I only skimmed through a lot of it. The Water section I almost skipped entirely. I love Woman Warrior but could not get into this book. Its style is sort of stream of consciousness so maybe I was not in the right frame of mind. I enjoyed the first part, about the fire and losing her father and her family but then it started to not make sense and was difficult to read. I gave it a 3 because I like her and the overall concept. Just not this book. Maybe I'll try again in a few years. I blame all our distractions. If I was on a desert island I am sure I would savor every word.

Chad says

SPOILER ALERT: This is the last paragraph in the book. I am not the type of person to read the last page first, but I think this is so beautiful I had to share it and I don't think it spoils anything about the rest of the book.

"Children, everybody, here's what to do during war: In a time of destruction, create something. A poem. A parade. A community. A school. A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment."

-Maxine Hong Kingston

Philippa says

Review published in the New Zealand Herald, November 2003

The Fifth Book of Peace
Maxine Hong Kingston
(Secker & Warburg, \$34.95)

Reviewed by Philippa Jamieson

This is a book to read in large chunks. A few pages before bed makes it hard to get into. Don't expect a plot. Don't expect a novel, or autobiography, or memoir – it's the Chinese form of 'talk-story', a collage of mythical, real and imaginary worlds.

Maxine Hong Kingston searches in vain for the lost books of peace of Chinese mythology. Did they really exist? She writes her own – The Fourth Book of Peace – but it's burnt to ashes in a bushfire that devastates her house, so she writes this, The Fifth Book of Peace.

After this memoir-type opening, the author switches to a novella embedded in the middle of the book, set during the Vietnam War. Chinese American Wittman Ah Sing leaves California for Hawai'i to dodge the draft, accompanied by his wife and son. How can he kill, let alone people who look like him? Through Wittman's hippie idealist eyes, in a stream-of-consciousness style, we see the inter-racial relationships in his new neighbourhood, peace demonstrations, and a church sanctuary for Vietnam deserters.

Then the book flips back to memoir: Kingston leads writing workshops for war veterans, incorporating meditation. This choppy, diary-like section is peppered with outpourings from the vets trying to come to terms with their traumatic experiences years after the events.

The book culminates in a TV crew filming the author at the village where Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh lives and teaches. The author writes: "I wanted the BBC to show the world a multicultural, multiracial America. Every time we go to war, we're in schizophrenic agony. Whoever the enemy is, they're related to us." There are brief references to the war in Iraq, September 11, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but here Vietnam is the symbol for the universal experience of war.

The sentiments are laudable, but this rambling 400-page treatise loses momentum, and lost my interest. A more severe edit would have eliminated repetition and the dross of detail.

jo says

i find this book amazing beyond words. if i had written it, i would think that my life work is done and i'd start preparing for death. okay, this is way too morbid. let me just say that i read this book at a point in my life when life really sucked, and by the time i finished it life was a large, generous, calm river teeming with colorful boats, peace, and possibilities.

i taught it and no one liked it. there must be truly few of us who find this book amazing. at least read the first stunning chapter.

Ashanti Miller says

Unstructured, but good. You really have to be in the mood for a meandereing story. The first part is great, but you will need a glass wone wine to slow your mind down to appreciate the rest of the book lest you miss all the hidden treasures. Whittman Ah Sing has always been difficult to fathom, yet strangley compelling. Crafty monkey...
