

BOOK CLUB in a bag

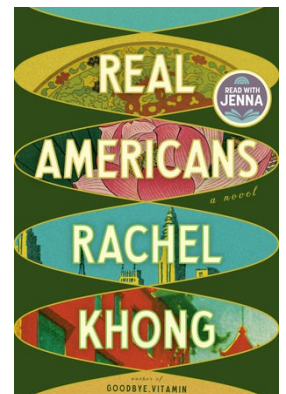


Real Americans

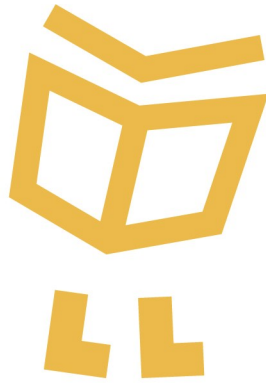
Rachel Khong

Discussion Questions

1. The prologue of the novel describes a brief scene with a character we later learn is May and a fabled lotus seed, which May swallows. In what ways did this action symbolically (or, perhaps, biologically) affect the course of action that would follow in May's life and, by extension, Lily's and Nick's? Do you think that if she hadn't swallowed the seed, the succeeding events would have transpired?
2. Within the first few chapters, it's clear that Lily was largely raised as an American without much knowledge of Chinese culture. What are some character traits that point to this? Why do you think immigrants assimilate to white American culture and mannerisms and raise their kids this way? In what ways does Lily yearn for a greater, richer understanding of her Chinese heritage?
3. When Lily visits Ping in Beijing, she realizes that she feels foreign even though everyone around her looks like her; page 105 reads, "Nothing indicated that I was American until I opened my mouth, and then there was invariably disappointment—even scorn—that I couldn't say what I wanted to say with my Chinese face." Discuss this passage as it relates to the identity crisis many American-born ethnic minorities face. In what ways does this crisis mirror Nick's perspective as a white-passing man who is half Chinese?
4. Toward the end of her segment, Lily promises to give Nick what she didn't receive growing up from her parents. Based on Nick's characteristics, in what ways did she achieve that? What are some personality traits Nick has that point to Lily's influence?
5. By the time he reaches college, Nick has met and developed a relationship with his father—and goes no-contact with his mother—but by the end of his chapter, it's clear he breaks off this relationship and leaves the Maier family. Discuss this shift and the factors that ultimately made Nick go no-contact with his father.
6. Do you think May and Otto's attempts at manipulating parental genetics were successful with Nick? In what ways did their attempts to prioritize Matthew's DNA succeed? What do you think Khong is trying to communicate here about how a person grows and develops traits, whether genetically or through learned behaviors?
7. Do you think May and Otto's attempts at manipulating parental genetics were successful with Nick? In what ways did their attempts to prioritize Matthew's DNA succeed? What do you think Khong is trying to communicate here about how a person grows and develops traits, whether genetically or through learned behaviors?
8. A running occurrence in this book involves secrets and lies that, although well intentioned, cause fault lines between family members. Discuss with examples from the book the unfortunate irony that trying to manufacture a perfect life leads to deep rifts between parent and child.



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About the Author

RACHEL KHONG is the author of *Goodbye, Vitamin*, winner of the California Book Award for First Fiction, and named a Best Book of the Year by NPR; *O*, *The Oprah Magazine*; *Vogue*; and *Esquire*. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Cut*, *The Guardian*, *The Paris Review*, and *Tin House*. In 2018, she founded The Ruby, a work and event space for women and nonbinary writers and artists in San Francisco's Mission District. She lives in California.

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