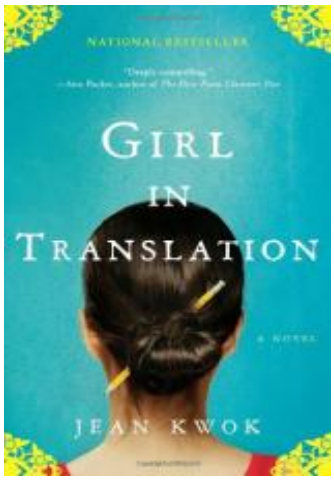
Girl in Translation

by Jean Kwok



About the Book

What is it like to be surrounded every day by a language and culture you only half understand? How would it change your life?

Introducing a fresh, exciting Chinese-American voice, GIRL IN TRANSLATION is an inspiring debut about a young immigrant in America, a smart girl balancing schoolwork and factory labor, custom and desire, a girl who is forced at a young age to take responsibility for her family?s future, with decisions she may later regret.

Discussion Guide

1. Throughout **Girl in Translation**, the author uses creative spelling to show Kimberly?s mis-hearing and misunderstanding of English words. How does the language of the novel evolve as Kimberly grows and matures? Do you see a change in the respective roles that English and Chinese play in the narrative as it progresses?

2. The word *translation* figures prominently in the title of the novel, and learning to translate between her two languages is key to Kimberly?s ability to thrive in her new life. Does she find herself translating back and forth in anything other than language? Clothing? Priorities? Expectations? Personality or behavior? Can you cite instances where this occurs, and why they are significant to the story as a whole?

3. Kimberly has two love interests in the book. How are the relationships that Matt and Curt offer different? Why do you think she ultimately chooses one boy over the other? What does that choice say about her? Can you see a future for her with the other boy? What would change?

4. In many ways Kimberly takes over the position of head of household after her family moves to New York. Was this change in roles inevitable? How do you imagine Ma feels about it? Embarrassed? Grateful? In which ways does Ma still

fulfill the role of mother?

5. Kimberly often refers to her father, and imagines how her life might have been different, easier, if he had lived. Do you think she is right?

6. Kimberly?s friend Annette never seems to grasp the depths of Kimberly?s poverty. What does this say about her? What lesson does this experience teach Kimberly? Is Kimberly right to keep the details of her home life a secret?

7. Kimberly believes that devoting herself to school will allow her to free her family from poverty. Does school always live up to her expectations? Where do you think it fails her? How does it help her succeed? Can you imagine the same character without the academic talent? How would her life be different? What would remain the same? Is Kimberly right to believe that all of her potential lies in her talent for school? Must qualities like ambition, drive, hope, and optimism go hand in hand with book smarts?

8. Think about other immigrant stories. How is Kimberly?s story universal? How is it unique? How does Kimberly?s Chinese-American story compare to other immigrant stories? Would it change if she were from a different country or culture?

9. Kimberly lives in extreme poverty. Was anything about her circumstances surprising to you? How has reading **Girl in Translation** affected your views of immigration? How can you apply these lessons in your community?

10. The story is set in the 1980s. Do you think immigrant experiences are much different today? What has changed? What has remained the same?

Author Bio

Jean Kwok is the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of DOMINION, THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, SEARCHING FOR SYLVIE LEE, GIRL IN TRANSLATION and MAMBO IN CHINATOWN. Her books have been chosen by th

In between her bachelor?s degree from Harvard and her MFA from Columbia, Kwok worked as a professional ballroom dancer. He

Critical Praise

"A journey into a world that would otherwise be veiled, **Girl in Translation** contrasts both sacrifice and accomplishment in the most satisfying of ways. Kwok?s vibrant prose makes us live Kimberly?s life almost as if it were our own."

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