ReadingGroupGuides
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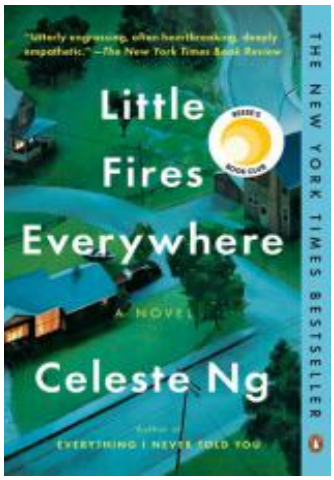
Little Fires Everywhere

by Celeste Ng



About the Book

From the bestselling author of EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU comes a riveting novel that traces the intertwined fates of the picture-perfect Richardson family and the enigmatic mother and daughter who upend their lives.

In Shaker Heights, a placid, progressive suburb of Cleveland, everything is planned --- from the layout of the winding roads, to the colors of the houses, to the successful lives its residents will go on to lead. And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules.

Enter Mia Warren --- an enigmatic artist and single mother --- who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenaged daughter Pearl, and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon Mia and Pearl become more than tenants: all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair. But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community.

When old family friends of the Richardsons attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town --- and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets in Mia's past. But her obsession will come at unexpected and devastating costs.

LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE explores the weight of secrets, the nature of art and identity, and the ferocious pull of motherhood --- and the danger of believing that following the rules can avert disaster.

Discussion Guide

1. Shaker Heights is almost another character in the novel. Do you believe that ?the best communities are planned?? Why or why not?

2. There are many different kinds of mother-daughter relationships in the novel. Which ones did you find most compelling? Do mothers have a unique ability to spark fires, for good and ill, in us?

3. Which of the Richardson children is most changed by the events of the novel? How do you think this time ultimately changes Lexie?s life? Trip?s? Moody?s? Izzy?s?

4. The debate over the fate of May Ling/Mirabelle is multilayered and heartbreaking. Who do you think should raise her?

5. How is motherhood defined throughout the book? How do choice, opportunity and circumstances impact different characters? approach to motherhood?

6. Mia?s journey to becoming an artist is almost a beautiful novella of its own. Mia?s art clearly has the power to change lives. What piece of art has shaped your life in an important way?

7. Pearl has led a singular life before arriving in Shaker, but once she meets the Richardsons, she has the chance to become a ?normal? teenager. Is that a good thing?

8. What ultimately bothers Elena most about Mia?

9. The novel begins with a great conflagration, but its conclusion is even more devastating. What do you think happens to Elena after the novel ends? To Mia and Pearl? To Izzy? Do you think Izzy ever returns to Shaker and her family? Why or why not?

10. Celeste Ng is noted for her ability to shift between the perspective of different characters in her work. How does that choice shape the reader?s experience of the novel?

11. We see how race and class underline the experiences of all the characters and how they interact with one another. In what ways are attitudes toward race and class different and the same today as in the late 1990s, when the book is set?

12. What does the title mean to you? What about the book?s dedication?

Author Bio

Celeste Ng is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU, LITTLE FIRES EVERYWHERE and OUR MISSING HEARTS. Ng is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation, and her work has been published in over 30 languages.

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