



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WANGS VS. THE WORLD BY JADE CHANG

1. Why is Charles Wang "mad at America" and "mad at history"? Does he have a right to be? To what extent is he the cause of his own misfortune? Or to what extent is he simply one of the millions of victims of the 2008 financial collapse?
2. How does this story differ from other immigrant stories you may have read? How does it differ in tone? Are Chang's characters as sympathetic as those in other coming-to-America novels? What about the characters' sense of displacement, their feeling of never being at home anywhere?
3. Describe the members of the Wang family: Charles, the patriarch; Barbra, Charles's wife; and the three children, Andrew, Grace, and Saina (pronounced Sy-na). What are their particular hopes and internal conflicts? What conflicts exist between the family members?
4. Follow-up to Question 3: Talk about the ways in which the Wang family meets the definition of "dysfunctional." Any similarities to issues within your own family?
5. The author has said that the Wangs struggle with and are influenced by "their experiences and knowledge as Chinese people...but they do not struggle over their Chineseness." What might she mean by that observation?
6. What does Chang have to say about the worlds of makeup and fashion, as well as the visual arts and stand-up comedy? What are the differing "currencies," other than money, that determine success or failure in these areas? What is valued...or how are individuals valued in these industries/markets? Do fashion, art, and comedy-performance have anything in common with one another?
7. How does the novel portray the power of the internet? What impact, for example, does the web have on Saina? The novel takes place back in 2008; is the Net different today?
8. How does Charles Wang view the American Dream? Does he consider it strictly an American invention, or does he see it as a universal longing, a dream shared by people everywhere? How do you see the American Dream?
9. In an interview with Rumpus.com, Chang was asked where she places the Wang family on the reality-to-absurdity spectrum, Chang said... I think that real life is absurd. There are plenty of things that happen in our day-to-day lives that would be unbelievable if we saw them in a movie or read about them in a book. So, to me, the story of the Wangs is in some ways larger than life—but I don't find any of it to be untrue. My goal was definitely emotional truth. Do you see life as absurd? Do you see the Wang story as absurd? If so, what is the emotional truth Chang refers to? Actually, maybe one might start with a definition of "absurdity."



This discussion sheet is property of the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource. Please return this sheet along with all of the books in the book bag to the Colorado State Library – Courier Code C912. Contact bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org with questions or concerns.



Colorado Book Club Resource

10. What do the characters—all of them, but in particular Charles—come to learn by the novel's end? What lessons do they learn or insights do they gain, about themselves, the world around them, and how they fit into this world?
11. Much has been made by reviewers about the book's humor. Point to some of the passages/events you find particularly funny.

Questions from litlovers.com



This discussion sheet is property of the Colorado State Library's Book Club Resource. Please return this sheet along with all of the books in the book bag to the Colorado State Library – Courier Code C912. Contact bookclub@coloradovirtuallibrary.org with questions or concerns.