

Girl in Translation Discussion Questions

Key Themes

1. One theme in the novel is ambition – both its costs and rewards. What are the sources of Kimberly's ambition? How did you feel about the way it affected her life and the lives of those closest to her?
2. Another theme in the novel is choice – or lack of choice. How much choice do you feel Kim and her mother had about their work and living conditions? What factors limited their options? Where in the story do you feel they could have made different choices? If you were Kim's mother, would you have asked her to work in the factory with you?
3. How are Kim's relationships with her peers and with educators complicated by her poverty and outsider status?
4. Kim's educational experiences – both in school and out – are a main theme of the book. How does the author capture their nuances and their effects on Kim? Would the kinds of experiences she describes with teachers and administrators happen in your school today?

Immigrant Life

5. What aspects of this immigrant story were surprising to you?
6. This is a tale set in part in an American sweatshop. What questions did Kim's experience raise for you? Where might you go to learn more about child labor in the U.S., legal and otherwise?
7. In what ways is Kim's a "typical" immigrant story, and in what ways is it distinctive? How does the book challenge or reinforce an image of the U.S. as a land of opportunity?
8. The "model minority" myth suggests that Asian American students are successful in education and in professional careers. How does Kimberly's story engage with this myth? What factors make her academic and economic ascent possible, and what might prevent others from reaching such heights?

Values

9. How did you interpret the relationship of Kim and her mother to Aunt Paula? How did the author use this relationship to deepen the reader's understanding of different value systems at play in the book?
10. How did Chinese values (such as the importance of familial obligations, respect for educators) that Kim and her mother brought with them to New York aid them there? How did they make their lives more difficult? With what impressions of Chinese values and culture did you come away?



Educating for Global Understanding

The Book

11. How does the prologue of the book inform or foreshadow the ending?
12. What did you think of how the author developed the character of Kimberly over the years? What sort of literary approaches did she use to build the readers' understanding of her experience, and did they allow you to see the world through Kim's eyes?
13. The three powerful peer relationships that Kim forms are with her friends Annette, Curt, and Matt. What role does each play in the book?
14. What did you think of the ending? How did you interpret Kim's ambivalence about her choices?
15. What does the title *Girl in Translation* mean? How does it reflect some of the main themes of the book?