



THE  
ORIGINAL  
DAUGHTER

BOOK CLUB KIT

## DEAR READER,

Growing up in Singapore, especially at the turn of the millennium, I was constantly aware of life's velocity, this feeling that reality was simultaneously accelerating and instantly becoming nostalgia-tinged before our eyes. I don't remember a time when I wasn't furiously documenting this in photographs and stories, terrified of looking up one day to find ourselves living in a totally unrecognizable state, advanced beyond our wildest imagination yet with our personal histories and quiet joys lost to the unreliability of memory. Eventually this coalesced into its own organic, parallel world, a pocket universe of prose that followed two girls as they tried to wrestle their destinies from a rapidly modernizing world determined to leave some behind. As our physical, digital, and social realities evolved, the girls kept their own time, an anchor around which my consciousness processed all I know and love of Singapore from a specific period in our contemporary history—and from that, after nearly a decade, *The Original Daughter* was born.



And so it feels totally unreal to be sharing this finished book with you, to finally be able to invite you into the lives of Gen and Arin. This is a novel about hustling and daydreaming, about independence and intimacy, and it asks what we're willing to sacrifice at the altar of ambition. But to me, above all, it has always been a novel about love. How does love persist in a world that's becoming ever more brutally efficient, and how does chosen family keep choosing each other, despite our lifelong struggle to both embrace and be free of those we love?

*The Original Daughter*, my firstborn, my debut, is so close to my heart, not least because the writing process has frequently reminded me of the many ways stories can provide the soft landings we so desperately seek. Books, fellow readers, and writers across the world have shepherded me to my soft landings more times than I can count, and I'm so grateful to you, dear reader, for coming to the novel and meeting the girls on the page with heart and candor. I started this book in 2014, and she'll be published in 2025—it has been such an odyssey, and I can't tell you what it means to me that she's finally home.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you love *The Original Daughter*.

## JEMIMAH

# THE ORIGINAL DAUGHTER by Jemimah Wei

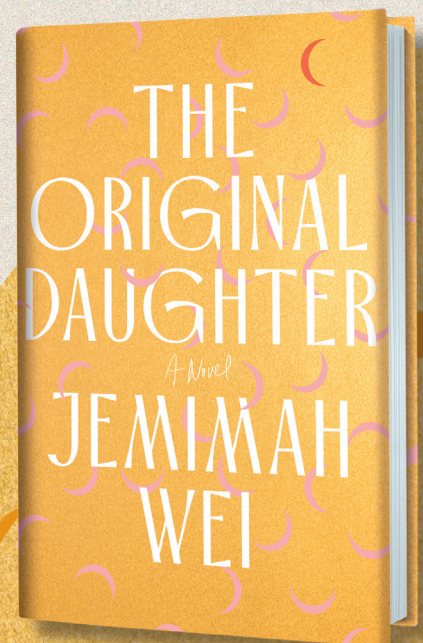
## Reading Group Guide

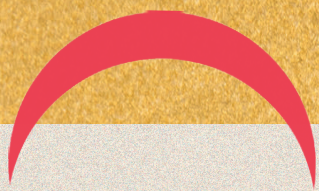
### About This Guide

The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation of Jemimah Wei's debut novel, *The Original Daughter*, a story of found sisterhood that explores the limits of love, fame, and forgiveness set against the backdrop of the infiltration of contemporary media.

### Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Have you ever held a grudge against, or been in an argument with, someone you love and wondered, like Genevieve, if it was too late to reconcile? How did Gen and Arin's falling out resonate with you, and did it offer a different perspective on your personal conflict? Consider Gen's sentiment at the end of the novel: "An existence animated by anger wasn't the same thing as a life" (p. 343).
2. Although the novel is written from Gen's point of view, could you imagine Arin's experience of her childhood, her rise to fame, and her last moments with her dying mother? Did she deserve Gen's resentment?
3. Discuss where in Gen and Arin's sisterhood their divergence began. Do you think it was doomed from the start, when they attempted to send Arin back home to Malaysia, or were there tiny fissures along the way as they competed for praise, accomplishment, and a sense of belonging?
4. Genevieve works extremely hard in school to earn top grades and her mother's approval, whereas Arin's success as an actress seems to be accidental or simply luck. Have you ever been on either side of this dynamic, and how did you deal with watching the other person's work (or lack thereof)?
5. Do you think Arin's "Land of Opportunity" essay was written from a genuine place? How do the sentiments of that essay shed light on her inner world and feelings toward her birth family and homeland that Gen's perspective cannot express—or understand?
6. How do you think Arin's future would have unfolded without Gen's help in preparing for that first YouTube role? And vice versa—if Gen had grown up as the only "original" daughter with her parents? Think about similar "what-ifs" in your own life, and whether you'd have wanted circumstances to be different in the end.
7. Did Su treat her daughters equally throughout their lives? Consider Gen's thought when she declares she's leaving for New Zealand: "... how much happier they'd be if I left, how much more comfort Arin was able to provide my mother, when I, her firstborn and original daughter, must have represented only a lifetime's accumulation of disappointment" (p. 203). On






what grounds does she think her mother is disappointed in her?

8. How does Gen's father leaving affect her connection and commitment to her family? Do you think she ever truly forgives him? Discuss their conversations at her mother's deathbed, as well as Su's reaction to his return.
9. Discuss the sense of expansion and independence that Gen finds in New Zealand. Do you think she truly enjoys her experience, or is it more of a reaction to, or release from, the strain and competition she felt at home?
10. How does Gen's relationship with her community in New Zealand—Micah, Hannah, Lily, Lorraine—change after Arin's visit? Does she feel a loss of identity, or is she reminded that she hasn't had her own identity since Arin arrived as a little girl?
11. Do you think Arin consciously manipulated Gen after the assault to be more successful in her film role? How might Gen have recovered from the assault, and her sexual encounter with Micah, without her sister's support?
12. Have you, or do you know anyone who has, experienced assault or harassment? Discuss the sensitivities around sharing the events with authorities and/or with friends and family. How do media representations of assault skew the reality of this common, yet often overlooked and minimized, experience?
13. How does the earthquake in New Zealand parallel the inner turmoil that Gen feels after the "premiere" of Arin's film?
14. How does the rise of media and social media overlay with the events of the novel? Could this story have happened in another time or era, and how might other social circumstances/facts have changed the plot?
15. What is unique about the kind of fame that Arin achieves? Does the fact that she started as a YouTube star change the authenticity of

her celebrity, compared, for instance, with actors with roots in theater or more traditional drama? If Gen hadn't cut Arin out of her life, do you think Arin's fame would have affected the whole family? Discuss Gen's assessment: "Anyone who's ever had the slightest brush with fame understands that it's like contagion. Once you've let your image out you can't sweep it back into a jar, the only way forward is through" (p. 309).

16. How do the sisters' attitudes differ around receiving help with their various goals? Consider what Arin did to procure investment in her debut film, and Gen's desire to set off on her own in New Zealand.
  17. Both Gen and Arin act as caretakers to Su in different ways during their lives. How would you characterize the sacrifices each makes for their mother, and the versions of Su that each daughter gets to know and spend time with? How do cultural expectations play into their sense of loyalty to their mother and home? Have you ever supported someone through end-of-life care and/or witnessed a death like the family does in the novel?
  18. "Love is an action word, I thought. It can be committed, like a crime" thinks Gen in her final contact with Arin after the earthquake in New Zealand (p. 299). What acts of love are committed in the book, and which would you consider to be "crimes"? Who is hurt the most because of their love?
  19. After Su's death, Gen frantically searches for her and Arin's contract of sisterhood but cannot find it. What would it have meant if she did find it?
  20. Were you surprised by what you found on the last page of the book? While reading them, did any scenes in the novel strike you as especially cinematic?
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## Suggested Further Reading

*The Neapolitan Novels* by Elena Ferrante  
*Our Missing Hearts* by Celeste Ng  
*Same As It Ever Was* by Claire Lombardo  
*Little Gods* by Meng Jin  
*Real Americans* by Rachel Khong

*Awake in the Floating City* by Susanna Kwan  
*Why I Killed My Best Friend* by Amanda Michalopoulou  
*Big Little Lies* by Liane Moriarty  
*Crying in H Mart* by Michelle Zauner

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## CHILDHOOD CHICKEN ONION SOUP (+ MACARONI!)

Best served in a mug!

Singapore sits just off the equator, so it's pretty humid all year-round, but we do get some crazy monsoon rains. When I was a child, every time the weather changed, my mother would make chicken onion soup to keep away the cold or flu. It's nourishing, comforting, delicious—and so easy to make. After I moved to New York City and the Bay Area, every time the weather turned cold, I'd bring out the recipe and make a giant pot, then dish it out into a coffee mug and sip from it while writing or reading. The best thing about soup is how it tastes even better the next day, so if you make a big enough portion, you can potentially be drinking increasingly delicious soup all week!

### RECIPE

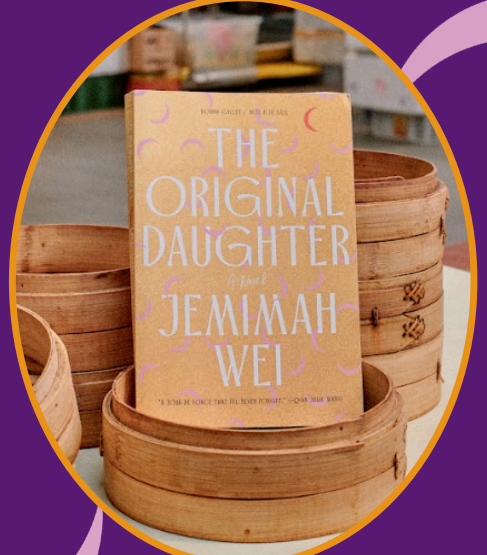
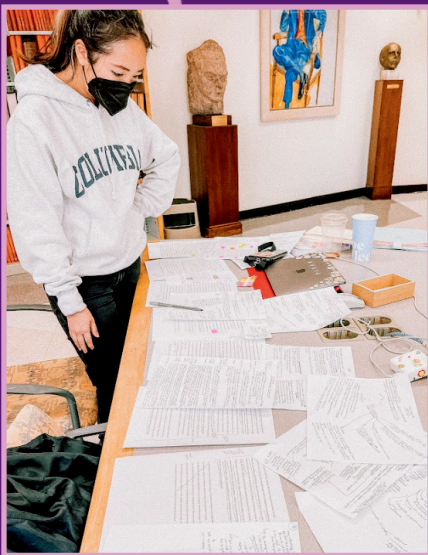
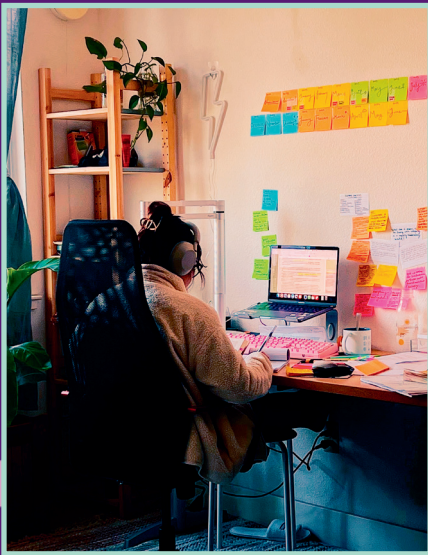
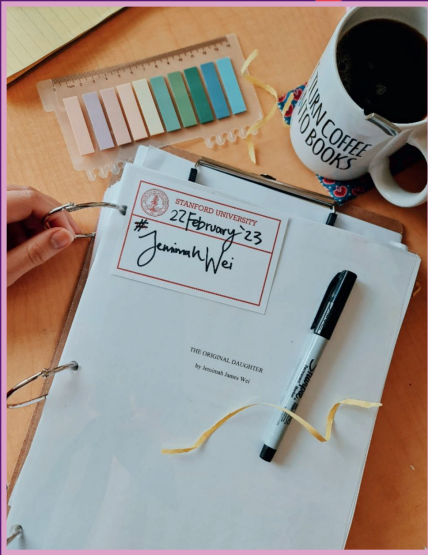
You'll need: a small chicken, 3 big onions (either red or yellow, but I prefer red), 1 medium carrot, and either salt or fish sauce to taste. Optional: macaroni.

1. Chop your chicken into about 12 pieces, halve your onions, and cut your carrot into chunks.
2. Put the chicken into a large pot of water, then bring the water to boil. Don't boil the water first or it'll make the chicken tough!
3. Once the water boils, remove the chicken. This removes the scum from the meat.
4. Empty the pot and refill it with 2 liters (about 2.1 quarts) of water. Add the boiled chicken, onions, and carrots. Cover and bring to boil, then switch to low heat and let it simmer for 45 to 60 minutes.
5. Season with salt or fish sauce to taste.
6. Optional: Boil the macaroni in another pot of water, and add as you wish to the soup for a one-dish meal.

This will feed 5 or 6 people for a dinner, or one really dedicated soup drinker over the course of many meals.

### DRINKING NOTES

I know people talk bowls up a lot, but I really believe that drinking soup out of a mug is the superior way to enjoy it at home. Mugs are beautifully insulated, you can hold a steaming mug by its handle, and you can sit on the couch with a portion of soup while you cozy up to read. What can I say? Writers are innovators.



# THE ORIGINAL DAUGHTER

## PLAYLIST

1. **The Seal Lullaby**—Eric Whitacre, VOCES8, Lavinia Meijer
2. **Shake It Out**—Florence + The Machine
3. **Welcome to My Life**—Simple Plan
4. **We're Going to Be Friends**—The White Stripes
5. **All My Friends**—LCD Soundsystem
6. **1234**—Feist
7. **Kids**—MGMT
8. **I'll Just Dance**—Su Lee
9. **Pressure to Party**—Julia Jacklin
10. **Under Pressure (Remastered 2011)**—Queen and David Bowie
11. **Help I'm Alive**—Metric
12. **The Middle**—Jimmy Eat World
13. **Bitter Sweet Symphony**—The Verve
14. **Thumbs**—Lucy Dacus
15. **Are You Happy?**—Oscar Lang
16. **Bruises**—Chairlift
17. **Strange Love**—Koop, Hilde Louise Asbjørnsen
18. **Second Best**—Laufey
19. **My Own Worst Enemy**—Lit
20. **Cop Car**—Mitski
21. **HURT**—Jasmine Sokko
22. **Pieces**—Sum 41
23. **Ain't It Fun**—Paramore
24. **Blow Away**—A Fine Frenzy
25. **Bless the Telephone**—Labi Siffre
26. **Rivers and Roads**—The Head and the Heart
27. **Heart of Glass**—Blondie
28. **Walking on Broken Glass**—Annie Lennox
29. **If I Ever Feel Better**—Phoenix
30. **On Hold**—The xx
31. **Wait It Out**—Imogen Heap
32. **In a Perfect World**—Kodaline
33. **Say Something**—A Great Big World and Christina Aguilera
34. **Class of 2013**—Mitski
35. **High Hopes**—Kodaline
36. **A House Is Not a Home**—Kristin Chenoweth
37. **Home (The Wiz)**—Glee cast version, featuring Kristin Chenoweth
38. **那些年**—Hu Xia
39. **For Good (Wicked)**—Original cast, Stephen Schwartz, Kristin Chenoweth, Idina Menzel, Stephen Oremus
40. **Dog Days Are Over**—Florence + The Machine

