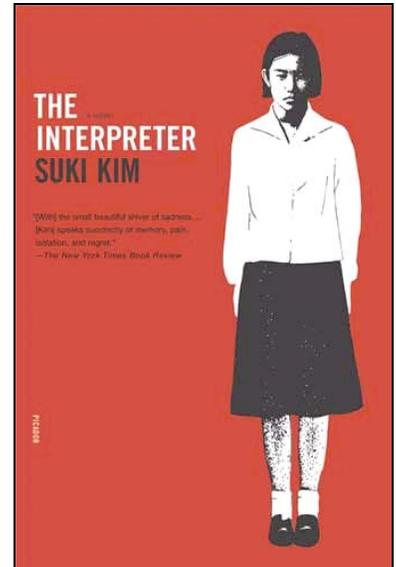


# READING GROUP GUIDE

## *The Interpreter*

by Suki Kim



### Introduction to *The Interpreter*

In this widely acclaimed debut novel, Suzy Park is a 29-year-old Korean-American interpreter for the New York City court system who inadvertently makes a startling and ominous discovery about her family's history--one that sends her on a chilling quest into her past.

Five years earlier, Suzy's parents--hardworking greengrocers who forfeited personal happiness for their children's gain--were brutally murdered in an apparent robbery of their Queens neighborhood market. Or so she believed, until now. The glint of one new lead after another entices Suzy into a dangerous underworld in hopes of unraveling the truth behind her parents' homicide. But other mysteries develop, such as the incessant hang-up calls on her answering machine and the anonymous delivery of irises on the anniversary of her parents' death.

Perhaps Grace, Suzy's estranged sister, can provide some answers--but Grace has suddenly and inexplicably vanished. So Suzy investigates her sister's disappearance by seeking out clues throughout the city--and throughout her own memories, dreams, and personal roots and recollections. Finally, all of the trails Suzy is following converge to offer a devastating new perspective on her family's secret and shameful past. Culturally sensitive, intelligently crafted, and brutally honest, *The Interpreter* is a "stylish and elegant psychological mystery [that is] utterly absorbing" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*).

### Praise for *The Interpreter*

"[With] the small beautiful shiver of sadness . . . [Kim] speaks succinctly of memory, pain, isolation, and regret."

— *The New York Times Book Review*

"Powerful and memorable . . . Engaging and haunting . . . [This novel] lingers in one's thoughts long past the last page."

— *Houston Chronicle*

"Riveting." — *Glamour*

"Outstanding." — *The New Criterion*

"Amazing." — *Jane*

"Kim compellingly describes the nuances of Korean immigrant life." — *Entertainment Weekly*

"Fascinating. . . a seductive allegory [that] figures translation as detective work."

— *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"Deftly crafted, original, and fitted together by a complex, believable and interesting [main] character . . . A stunning first novel . . . Hauntingly enthralling." — *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis)

"Bold and edgy, haunting and suspenseful. Kim fractures the image of the happy Asian immigrant and reassembles it, shard by compelling shard."

— Manil Suri, author of *The Death of Vishnu*

"An intriguing, tortured portrait of a second-generation Korean-American by a promising young writer . . . Few writers chronicle the Korean-American experience, and even fewer are as talented as Kim."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"Ghostlike . . . A sleek, nearly hypnotic glimpse into the world of a Korean family ruptured in translation to America." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Kim's debut novel boasts both a heroine who is compelling and likable, despite her faults, and a gripping story." — *Booklist*

## Reading Group Guide Questions

1. Discuss the fractured or off-kilter quality of this narrative. How, if at all, do the disjunctive aspects of its prose and plot echo its treatment of such dualities as home and family, loss and grief, love and sex, work and success, self and other, betrayal and guilt, language and translation.
2. In Chapter 2, Suzy reflects that "truth . . . comes in different shades, different languages." Comment on how this early sentiment is reflected or refracted throughout the entirety of the novel.
3. To what extent is *The Interpreter* a satire on--if not a severe or far-reaching critique of--contemporary American life? Look again at the opening paragraph of Chapter 5, for example. Or, specifically in terms of academic satire, consider the character of Professor Tamiko (who in Chapter 8 wonders whether Shakespeare might "be the biggest con man of the world's literature.")
4. What do we learn about Grace, Suzy's sister, over the course of the book? What was she like as a child, what is she like as a sibling, and what might she be like as an adult? Explain both her psychology and her motivation as a character. Why do you suppose we never encounter her directly in *The Interpreter*? And why is it significant or telling that Grace is now employed as an ESL teacher?
5. Reflecting on the full scope and overall tone of the novel, what personal obligations and responsibilities does author Suki Kim seem to value or cherish most in life? You may want to include in your discussion such key themes as trust, honor, loyalty, friendship, and parenthood.

6. Discuss *The Interpreter* as a work of mystery fiction. Which riddles or problems are solved in this novel? Which remain unsolved? Identify the book's most important clues, as well as its red herrings. What are Suzy's strengths as a sleuth or investigator? What are her weaknesses? Were you satisfied by this mystery's ending, conclusion, and/or resolution? Why or why not?
7. Explain the *boricha* metaphor appearing in Chapter 19.
8. What did reading this book tell or teach you about the culture, thought, history, and experience of the Korean people--or, more specifically, of Korean-Americans? (In this regard, see especially Chapter 22.) And what did it tell or teach you about life in today's New York City?
9. Where does Kim's novel come down on the stereotypical view of Asian immigrants as model citizens, quietly self-content neighbors, hardworking pacifists, and so forth? And where, in your estimation, does it come down on "the American Dream" more generally?
10. Explore the symbolic possibilities or alternatives of the novel's title. What is being (or has been) interpreted here, and who--apart from Suzy--might the interpreters be? What new meanings or fresh connotations can you apply to "interpretation" upon finishing the book?

## About the Author

**Suki Kim** was born and raised in South Korea and came to New York at the age of thirteen. Her nonfiction has appeared in *The New York Review of Books* and *The New York Times*. She is a graduate of Barnard College and lives in Manhattan.

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