

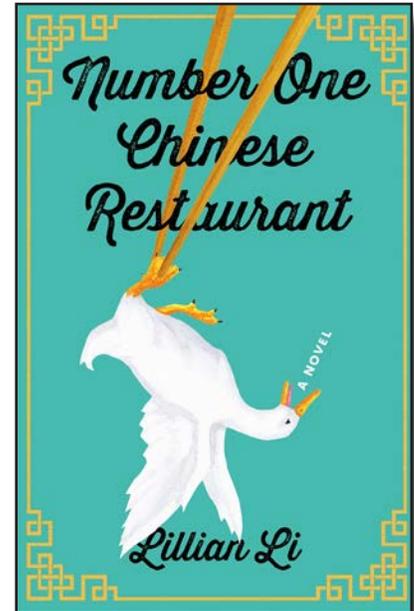
Number One Chinese Restaurant

A Novel

by Lillian Li

About This Guide

In *Number One Chinese Restaurant*, Lillian Li's characters struggle with their complicated lives and loves as they spend their days working in a beloved Chinese restaurant. The conflicts and choices made by Li's characters raise many interesting themes for discussion. The questions below are designed to enhance your reading group's conversation about *Number One Chinese Restaurant*.



ISBN: 978-1-2501-4130-9

Questions for Discussion

1. Jimmy longs to establish a new restaurant that does away with many of the stereotypical features of Chinese cuisine in America—padded booths, Lazy Susans, a menu of easily recognizable dishes, and waiters with heavy accents. What does his desire to eliminate these elements say about his identity as Chinese-American, as well as his relationship with his father, who embraced such classic staples to make a profit? How does his opinion change after opening the Beijing Glory, and why?
2. “I don’t know my own family, and I’ve lived and worked with them my entire life,” Jimmy says to Janine. How can proximity to so many people—the restaurant family that Jimmy has more or less chosen and the family he was born into—still cause them to remain strangers in some ways? Are there people in your own life who you see on a daily basis but still remain strangers to you? Do you wish you had a deeper connection with these people, or in some cases, does it help to remain distant?
3. The novel follows three workplace romances: Ah-Jack and Nan, Jimmy and Janine, and Pat and Annie. How are these relationships alike, and how are they different from one another? What sort of factors—age, socioeconomic status, upbringing—might account for these differences, and in what ways may they not?

4. Uncle Pang is willing to grease palms and put other lives in jeopardy to get what he wants, with seemingly little regard for the consequences. But Jimmy, Annie, Pat, and many of this novel's other characters are shaped by the mistakes they make. What can be learned about the value of mistakes from the problems these characters have caused, as well as the subsequent handling of them?
5. Although part of the family business, both Pat and Annie at times push away from their familial expectations to act out as typical American teenagers. What challenges do they face as first-generation Asian-Americans, and how do they embrace this cultural dichotomy? What sort of issues naturally arise between immigrant parents and their American-born children?
6. As parents, Nan, Johnny, and Feng Fei must make difficult decisions for the futures of their children. How do the decisions parents make help or hurt their children in this novel? In what ways does this novel serve as a resource for understanding and analyzing your own family dynamics and/or the legacy of culture and tradition in your life?
7. Many characters in *Number One Chinese Restaurant* are searching for and offering forgiveness. Does Jimmy see something in Pat that causes Jimmy to offer Pat his forgiveness, and how might forgiving Pat separate Jimmy from Pang—and with what consequences for Jimmy?
8. Even after attempting to move away from the Duck House, the legacy his father has left behind, and the ways of his family, Jimmy is desperate to hold onto certain traditions. Why do you think Jimmy feels the need to hold on to tradition? And what is a legacy? Can legacy be redefined as those who carry it on continue to grow and change?
9. Like the staff within every city's or town's favorite restaurant, the Duck House family is a group of people who work twelve hours a day, six days a week, closer to each other than to the families they leave at home. Did reading this novel change your perspective on the staff in any restaurant or business where you have been a customer? If so, how has your perspective on those people changed, and what might you have learned or discovered about yourself from those changes?
10. What expectations did you have for the book when you encountered its title, *Number One Chinese Restaurant*? Why do you think the author chose this title? What attitudes or opinions might the characters have toward such a proclamation? What attitudes or opinions did you have, and did those change as you read?