

1. How would you describe Mrs. Richardson and Mia, the two mothers in this novel? In what ways are they different? Why might the former always be referred to as "Mrs." rather than Elena, while Mia is always referred to by her first name? Clearly it is done purposely by the author: how does it shape the way we feel about the two women?

2. Talk about the four Richardson children, Lexi, Trip, Moody, and Izzy. Are any of the four more sympathetic than others? What is their relationship to one another? How does their affluence shape their outlooks on life?

3. Now consider Pearl: what is she like a character? How has her peripatetic upbringing, being uprooted frequently, shape her view of things? What draws her to the Richardsons?

4. Why is Moody drawn to Pearl? What does she offer him? What attracts Lexi to Pearl, certainly an unlikely friendship? In fact, overall, how is Pearl thought of/treated in the family? What does Mia think of her daughter's involvement with the Richardsons?

5. What about Izzy? Why is Mrs. Richardson more impatient with and critical of her than with the others? From the novel's first paragraph, we are told that people always thought Izzy somewhat of a "lunatic." Is that a fair assessment? As the novel progresses, what do you learn about her lunacy.

6. Why is Izzy drawn to Mia, and vice versa? What do the two see in one another?

7. What were your thoughts regarding the Mirabelle McCullough / May Ling Chow case? Whose side were on? Did your allegiance change?

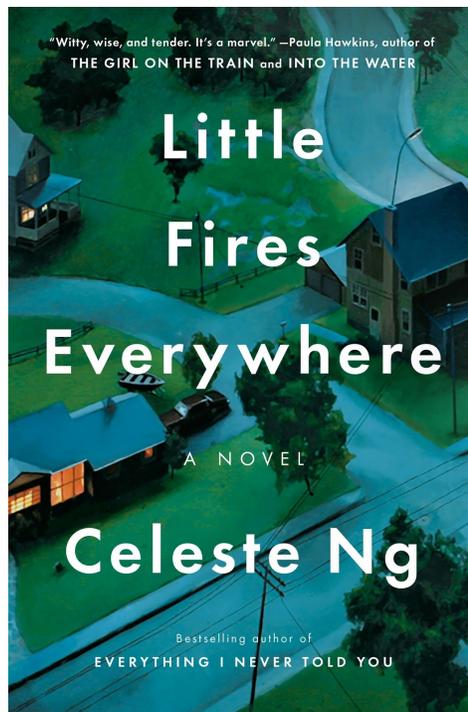
8. How are class and race treated in this novel? What impact do they have on the story's events and the way the characters respond?

9. Describe Shaker Heights and its sense of itself as a refuge and "a little bit of heaven on earth." Would you enjoy living there or somewhere like it? Consider why Celeste Ng might have set her novel in such a place?

10. The novel's opening begins with the fire and then goes backward in time to trace events leading up to it. Why might Celeste Ng have structured her novel to begin with the ending and the most dramatic event? How does the reverse structure affect your reading of the story?

11. How does Mrs. Richardson respond to the fire — immediately and then later at night. What does she come to realize about Izzy and her role in her daughter's behavior. Does she gain your sympathy at the end?

12. What do you think/hope will happen to Izzy, Mia, and Pearl?



13. What is the significance of the title: to what do the "little fires everywhere" refer?