



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

Yellowface by R. F. Kuang

1. Roland Barthes published the essay, “The Death of the Author” in 1967 on whether the author’s identity and biography are relevant to the meaning of a text. What do you take the ‘death of the author’ to mean? Do you agree? How much does the identity and biography of the author affect how you interpret a text, if at all? Does it change things if the author is still living? If they died over a century ago?
2. June feels betrayed by Athena for writing a story about a traumatic experience she suffered during college. Do you think what Athena did was wrong? Is it ethical to publish fiction drawn explicitly from someone else’s life. What obligations, if any, do authors have towards living subjects who inspire their stories?
3. Can we ever argue that someone does or doesn’t have the right to tell a certain story? Where do we draw the line between this and censorship? What makes for ‘bad’ literary representation? What constitutes the ‘harm’ done by bad literary representation?
4. Much of June’s anxiety about her writing career comes from paranoia about how other authors perceive her and compare against her. John Banville once offered the following advice for young writers: “I remind them, as gently as I can, that they are on their own, with no help available anywhere.” Is writing a necessarily solitary activity?
5. June justifies finishing Athena’s manuscript by arguing it is better for her story to reach the world than to linger unpublished, or to be posthumously published in unfinished form. Do you agree?
6. Athena in many respects rankles against her canonical status as an Asian American author. Why might she feel resentful towards her own community?

The above questions were taken from
<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/printpdf/reviews/yellowface>
to enhance your discussion of the book.

Author Biography

Rebecca F. Kuang is an award winning #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the Poppy War trilogy and *Babel: An Arcane History*, as well as *Yellowface*. She has an MPhil in Chinese Studies from Cambridge and an MSc in Contemporary Chinese Studies from Oxford.

<https://rfkuang.com/about/>

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