

Others Were Emeralds

Harper Perennial

By: Lang Leav

ISBN: 9780063304024

Introduction

Internationally acclaimed poet Lang Leav's debut adult novel combines her poetical lyricism and emotional acumen to create an enthralling coming of age narrative set against the backdrop of anti-Asian sentiment sweeping Australia in the late 90's. A stirring portrayal of guilt, loss, and memory, *Others Were Emeralds* explores the inherent danger of allowing our misconceptions to shape our reality.

What comes first, the photograph or the memory?

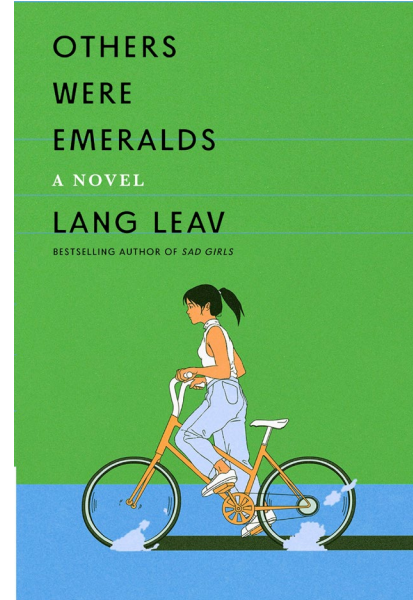
The daughter of Cambodian refugees, Ai grew up in the small Australian town of Whitlam populated by Asian immigrants who once fled war-torn countries to rebuild their shattered lives. It is now the late '90s and despite their parents' harrowing past, Ai and her tightknit group of school friends: charismatic Brigitte, sweet, endearing Bowie, shy, inscrutable Tin, and politically minded Syng, lead seemingly ordinary lives, far removed from the unimaginable horrors suffered by their parents.

But that carefree innocence is shattered in their last year of school when Ai and her friends encounter a pair of racist men whose cruel acts of intimidation spiral into senseless violence. Grappling with the magnitude of her grief at such a young age, Ai leaves Whitlam for college before her trauma has a chance to fully resolve.

In her second year of college Ai suffers a mental health crisis, driving her back home to Whitlam, a place she swore never to return. There, she reconnects with those she left behind and together they are compelled to look back on the tragedy that shaped their adolescence and examine the role they may have unwittingly played.

Questions for Discussion

1. The novel opens on a typical Australian white sand beach scene. How does this scene contrast with the author's descriptions of the immigrant town, Whitlam?
2. Throughout the novel "Others Were Emeralds," doors are symbolically used to signify significant changes. Can you identify instances where doors appear in the book and discuss their possible meanings?
3. During Ai and Bowie's surprise Valentine's Day date, they are pursued by a magpie and take refuge in a tunnel. The theme of running from danger is recurrent in the book. Can you find other examples of this theme and discuss their implications?



4. The author portrays a historical period in Australia when Asian Australians faced discrimination as second-class citizens. How is this reflected indirectly in Ai's daily life?
5. The title "Others Were Emeralds" is a phrase taken from the book. Explore other ways this title may relate to the characters and their societal positions.
6. Ai becomes increasingly suspicious of Brigitte's intentions toward Bowie. To what extent is Sying responsible for influencing Ai's suspicions?
7. Tri is introduced late in the book. Why was her surprise appearance pivotal in helping Ai piece together the events that occurred at Brigitte's place the night before the picnic?
8. What was the political climate in Australia in 1997, and what events contributed to the rising anti-Asian sentiment during that period?
9. In Ai and Brigitte's friendship, a series of misunderstandings drives them further apart. Which of these misunderstandings do you think were the most significant?
10. What kind of photographs does Ai discover in Brigitte's camera roll, and how does this aid in her understanding of her friend's motives?
11. The narrative is presented solely from Ai's perspective. Are there any moments in the book where we gain rare insights into how others perceive Ai?
12. How does Ai's opinion of her immigrant mother change over the course of the book?
13. How does grief play a role in shaping the characters and their actions throughout the novel?