

RED SEAL

A Novel

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BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

1. *Red Seal* is largely a story about migration, which can be defined as a temporary movement of people from one place to another. How are Miyoung's and Ko-chan's lives shaped by their experience of living outside their ancestral homeland? Would you consider them refugees—people who are forced to leave their country to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster—or do you think their choices were voluntary? What did freedom look like for them?
2. Miyoung longs to keep Soonho safe and holds him close, even as he yearns to find his own identity and define a future for himself. How does her fear of losing Soonho play out in her relationship with him? How would you characterize her love for her son? How is her behavior toward her daughter, Soonbok, the same or different?
3. Miyoung's love for Soonho's adoptive father, Insu Kim, is complicated. If Miyoung hadn't met Mr. Kim when she had, do you think she would have stayed with him? Would you have made the decision to move in with Insu's family? Do you agree with her choice to allow Soonho to change his name to Kim?
4. The relationship between Miyoung and Soonho is central to this novel. How do Miyoung's goals conflict with her son's wishes over the years? How do Soonho's dreams affect his mother? How do they change, both separately and together?
5. Soonho is only six years old when he leaves Japan with his mother, uprooted from everything familiar and a grandmother he loves. How would you define Soonho's personality, conflicts, and desires as a child, and later as an adult? What do you think of his decision to change his name back to Kwon? What about his choice to move to the US?
6. Identity is a high-stakes theme in this novel. Miyoung and Soonho largely passed as Japanese in Manchuria but hid their connection to Japan when they migrated to north Korea, and later to south Korea. Soonho adapts to communism when he lives in north Korea but is later shunned for his association with the north. What does this novel show about how people navigate their identities to survive? Did you learn anything new about the lives of ordinary people during this period? What parallels do you see with our times?
7. Hojoon's dojang, or name seal, was Miyoung's most prized possession. Why do you think she gave it to Soonho when she did? What significance does the name seal carry for Soonho? Do his feelings about it change when he meets Jeanyoon, or when he has children of his own?
8. Miyoung struggles with her role as a mother throughout the book. She is mostly a single parent, nurse, and midwife, at a time when women didn't have careers. How does being a single mother inform her parenting? What cultural and societal factors affect how one parents? What do you think of Jeanyoon as a mother? Youngsub? How have women's roles changed since Miyoung's time?
9. Life in present-day North Korea is largely unknown. How did this novel help you learn more about the history of North Korea? Were you surprised by how quickly Soonho became indoctrinated into communism? What did you think of Miyoung's decision to take Soonho and flee to the south? How did that alter their relationship?

10. Miyoung harbors deep secrets. She keeps Soonho's paternity a secret from everyone, including her own daughter. She lied to Soonho and his grandmother when she brought him to Korea. Are secrets sometimes justified? What do Miyoung's decisions tell us about her as a person? As a mother?
11. US involvement in Asia is depicted throughout this novel. What is your view of the role the US played in the past and continues to play in this region? How does Korea view America now, given the popularity of K-drama, K-pop, and Korean food in the US? Have the roles changed?
12. Letters play a large part in the novel, as they are the only way Miyoung and Soonho can communicate when they are separated. What do these letters reveal about the individuals and their relationship? How do the letters change over time? Do you like to write letters? Why or why not?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Rosa Kwon Easton is a Korean American lawyer, a library trustee, and the author of *White Mulberry*, a #1 bestseller in historical fiction. Named a “Best Book” by, among others, *Parade* magazine, BookBub, and Book Riot, *White Mulberry* has been translated into multiple languages. Easton is an Anaphora Writing Residency Fellow, and her work has appeared in *CRAFT* Literary, *Electric Literature*, *Writer’s Digest*, and elsewhere. A graduate of Smith College, Columbia University, and Boston College Law School, she resides with her husband and Maltipoo in sunny Southern California. For more information, visit www.rosakwoneaston.com.