

the ASTONISHING COLOR of AFTER

by EMILY X.R. PAN

“Emily X.R. Pan’s brilliantly crafted, harrowing first novel portrays the vast spectrum of love and grief with heart-wrenching beauty and candor. This is a very special book.”

—John Green



ABOUT THE BOOK:

Leigh Chen Sanders is absolutely certain about one thing: When her mother died by suicide, she turned into a bird.

Leigh, who is half Asian and half white, travels to Taiwan to meet her maternal grandparents for the first time. There, she is determined to find her mother, the bird. In her search, she winds up chasing after ghosts, uncovering family secrets, and forging a new relationship with her grandparents. And as she grieves, she must try to reconcile the fact that on the same day she kissed her best friend and longtime secret crush, Axel, her mother was taking her own life.

Alternating between reality and magic, past and present, friendship and romance, hope and despair, *The Astonishing Color of After* is a novel about finding oneself through family history, art, grief, and love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The novel opens, “My mother is a bird.” What role does the bird play throughout the story and how does it change as the story progresses?
2. The story has a nonlinear narrative where it’s told in the present and through flashbacks. Why do you think it was told through this narrative structure? Did you find it effective?
3. Throughout the book, Leigh struggles with her identity as someone who is half white and half Taiwanese. How do you think she ends up finding her identity?
4. Communication is an ongoing issue in the book, whether it is Leigh with her grandparents or with her best friend, Axel. Does communication ever get easier for Leigh? Have you ever experienced something similar to her?
5. What significance do food and tea bring to the book? How did they affect your understanding of the characters?
6. When Leigh meets Feng, she is jealous of Feng’s connection with her grandparents. How does Feng serve as a foil to Leigh’s character?
7. The book has a realistic setting with elements of magic. Why did the author choose to incorporate magic? What impact did magic have on the novel?
8. Why do you think Leigh’s mother kept her sister a secret from her daughter? If Leigh had known this secret earlier, how would it have changed the way she viewed her family?
9. Grief is at the core of this novel as Leigh tries to find closure after her mom’s death by suicide. How does her family treat mental health? Why do you think there’s still a stigma on mental health issues?
10. How does Leigh use color to convey her emotions? What color do you think represents the novel?