

The Leavers
ARRT Book Club Study
Book Discussion Notes
Wednesday, November 7, 2018
2:00-3:10 p.m.
Stickney-Forest View Public Library District
14 participants

Discussion led by: Sonia Reppe
Note taker: Elizabeth Hopkins

Sonia began the discussion by asking everyone to introduce themselves. She then noted that the e-book came with unique discussion questions and she would be using them.

-Did everyone finish?

- Mostly yes. A few readers listened to the audio. One narrator with different voices. Very well done. "Audio is essential with foreign names and places."

-Let's talk about the significance of the names. What did you think?

- All the names changed- it was so interesting.
- How misguided that they thought they were doing him a favor by changing his name.
- I have friends who let their adopted children choose their names when they're older.
- Forcing an older child to change his name seemed so strange.

-What does this (name changing) say about identity?

- His whole identity shifted when he moved and changed his name.
- Sad that he lost his language for a while.
- This entire book blew my mind in many ways. Neither of them fit anywhere.
- She threw every stereotype about immigrants at us, but her two main characters didn't fit any of them.
- It's also not clear if they will ever find peace.
- The ending didn't surprise me because she was never quite content. She was still searching at the end.

-What did you think about Kay and Peter? Did you feel bad for them?

- I didn't want to, but I did. We only saw them through Daniel. They were not equipped to do this with an older child.
- They kept showing up for him.
- But they wanted him to be this cookie cutter kid.
- They were tone deaf about a lot of things.
- I know people like them...but they're birth parents.
- They have a very small worldview.
- Their hearts were in the right place, but they made a lot of poor decisions.
- They were in their own bubble- they had no point of reference.

-On gambling,

- The gambling addiction was hard to understand if you haven't had that experience.
- Did the addiction even help the story? It wasn't needed for his arc.
- The addiction didn't bother me as much as the lying.
- But doesn't lying feed into addictive behavior?
- \$10,000 wasn't realistic. I have a lot of close friends- I wouldn't give them \$10,000!

-Did the format (1st/3rd person) work for you?

- It's a longer book than the page count!
- Narration- the switch between 1st and 3rd person was definitely noticeable on audio. Easier to distinguish between different characters.
- Very intimate (on audio) when Polly was speaking.
- I think we like Polly more *because* of the first person.

-On Polly,

- So intelligent. Life was not cooperating with her. Hard to be critical of her because that has never been my life.
- More sympathy for her because I'm a mother.
- All of the adults are guilty of not processing the emotional hardship on the children.
- Polly knew she couldn't live in this immigration status much longer.

- This is the opposite of the American Dream...she had to go back to China even though she worked so hard.