Our Missing Hearts

Discussion Questions

1. The Preservation of American Culture and Traditions (PACT) Act fundamentally reshapes society through fear and censorship. Discuss how the Act is enforced and how it affects everyday life (school, libraries, jobs). What elements of the PACT Act feel familiar or plausible in today's world?

2. Ng explores the immense power of art, specifically Margaret Miu's poetry and installations, to provoke and incite both fear and hope. Why do authoritarian regimes, like the one Bird lives in, often target artists and storytellers first?

3. The novel presents librarians as quiet, powerful keepers of banned stories, serving as a form of underground resistance. Discuss the symbolism of the library system in this narrative. In what ways are they the true "missing hearts" of this community?

4. The community's response to the PACT Act is largely silence and compliance, fueled by the fear of having children "re-placed." How does this fear-driven silence corrupt individual integrity and communal connection?

5. Bird, initially compliant and quiet, is forced to confront the censored reality of his mother. How does Bird's journey from a passive observer to an active seeker mirror the classic hero's journey?

6. The heart of the story is the relationship between Bird and Margaret. Why did Margaret leave, and how did her absence both protect and harm Bird? Discuss the complicated nature of her sacrifice. What does she want Bird to remember, and what does she want him to forget?

7. Bird's full name is Noah Gardner. When does he use which name, and what does his choice reveal about the identity he is embracing or rejecting? How do the names of other characters (like Margaret's use of her Chinese name) relate to their sense of belonging?

8. Bird is constantly struggling with fragments of his past and the deliberately forgotten memories of his mother. How does the novel illustrate the difference between what we choose to forget and what society forces us to forget?

9. The resistance movement in Our Missing Hearts is often quiet and decentralized. Compare and contrast the methods of resistance used by Margaret, the network of librarians, and even Bird himself. Which form of resistance do you believe is most effective in the context of the novel's world?

10. Margaret Miu, a Chinese American poet, and others who are targeted by the PACT Act are often depicted as outsiders. How does the novel explore the concept of "us vs. them" and the way society scapegoats minority groups during times of crisis?

11. The novel concludes with a powerful act of visibility and storytelling. Do you find the ending to be hopeful, despite the ongoing existence of the PACT Act? What is the significance of the world finally seeing the missing children and the art that commemorates them?

12. What do you think "Our Missing Hearts" refers to? Is it the children who are "re-placed," the parents who lose them, the silenced stories, or the capacity for empathy that has been stripped from society?