

ENGLISH 4 IB HL



UNIT I

ONE

1. Do you notice any foreshadowing in the initial pages?
2. What seems to be the attitude (tone) of the narrator?
3. Analyze the Richardson kids. How are they different?
4. What do the kids' cars suggest about them?
5. Compare Mia's possessions to the Richardsons'.
6. How is the clash of cultures prefigured here?
7. What is the role of gossip in this community?
8. What makes Izzy "mental" according to Moody?

TWO

1. The organizing principles of Shaker Heights seem to impact its present day values. How? Is this universally true?
2. Compare/Contrast the history/backgrounds of the Warrens & the Richardsons. How do they shape the characters?
3. Is there a conversation to be had about privilege here?

THREE

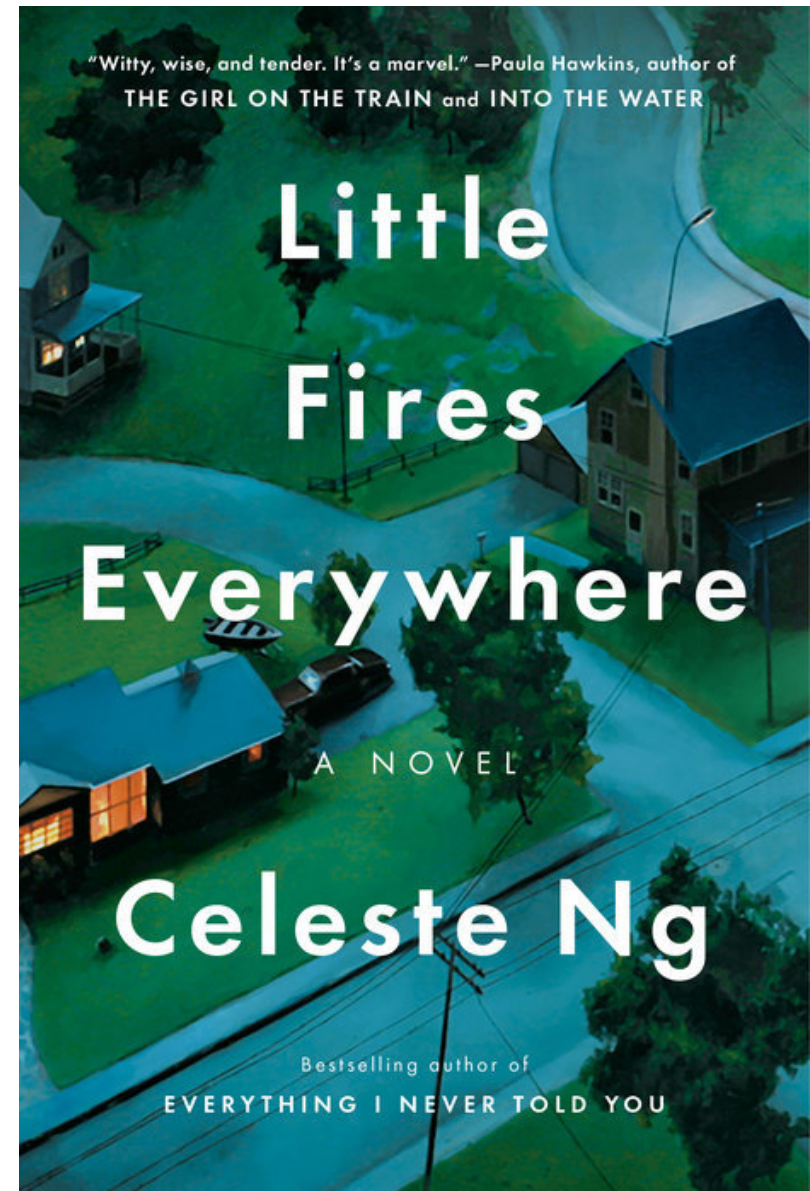
1. What kind of art does Mia create?
2. What does Mia's art reveal about her character?
3. Can you identify an emerging theme for the novel at this point?

CHAPTERS 1-3



1. How do the parents' values seem to impact their kids?
2. What is so appealing about Jerry Springer and how is this relevant to the larger issues developing in the novel?
3. In what ways do we see Izzy's character taking shape?
4. Lexie's stupid comment—why? Explore multiple possibilities.
5. At the close of Chapter 5 we seem to have three plot threads: Mirabelle, the fire, and Pearl's parentage. At this point, did you see how all three are related? Do you see it now, having finished the book?
6. *The Wizard of Oz* from the Wicked Witch's perspective? Celeste is very clever—we know, of course, that this has since been done to blockbuster effect. But, seriously, why can Pearl write this essay, and Lexie can't?
7. Um, we need to talk about this party, y'all...
8. Analyze the convo between Mia and Elena. Who is the good guy/bad guy here? (Yes, it's a trick question.)

CHAPTERS 4-6



1. What underlies Pearl's objection to Mia's working for the Richardsons?
2. Can you relate to the Richardsons' loss of youthful idealism as the years have passed and their circumstances changed? How do you think Celeste feels about Mr. Richardson?
3. You are the school psychologist—write a profile of Izzy based on the information in Chapter 7.
4. Do you like the way Mia interacts with Izzy? Why or why not?
5. Look up the poem by Larkin cited in Chapter 7 and write a brief assessment of it.
6. In light of the toothpick episode, what are some injustices you see at your own school? Do you see how the issues in play here relate to our current society—in what ways? What roles do emotion and reason play in addressing such matters?
7. Chapter 8 centers around the crucial plot element of the photo of Mia and Pearl in the art museum. Discuss the various characters' reactions to the photo and their respective motivations to uncover its origins.

CHAPTERS 7-8



1. Consider Izzy’s childhood narrative in the context of the “nature vs. nurture” argument; do you see a connection here to other plot lines in the novel? Is some kind of theme taking shape?
2. Judge Mia’s motives and actions at the end of Chapter 9.
3. Do you have any sympathy for the McCulloughs? What techniques does Celeste use to create sympathy for them—or to undermine it?
4. Judge Elena’s motives and actions at the end of Chapter 10.



At this point in the book, do you *like* any of these characters?

Do you *hate* any?

CHAPTERS 9-10



1. 100th Bomb Group is a real restaurant in Cleveland. Look it up and discuss how visualizing the setting might impact the way we interpret this episode.
2. When I first read the restaurant scene, I viewed Mrs. Richardson as truly diabolical. Do you think Celeste is asking readers to “suspend their disbelief” too much? Why or why not?
3. What is ironic about Mrs. Richardson’s discussion of journalism with Pearl?
4. What are the boundaries to the Employer/Employee relationship, in your opinion? Is Mrs. Richardson crossing lines? Or, is she only doing what Mia has already done?
5. Analyze the conversation between Lexie and Brian.
6. Do you think Mrs. Richardson has made wrong choices in her life?
7. Do a close reading of the last four paragraphs in Chapter 11.
8. Write some prompts for discussion based on Chapter 12 to share with the class. What’s important here?

CHAPTERS 11-12



1. Photography is discussed in some detail here—why? In what ways might it be a useful motif in the novel? Btw, do you think photography is a lost art?
2. How does Mia’s backstory influence the way you view her character? Evaluate her options at the end of the chapter.
3. Is the novel subconsciously (or overtly) suggesting a predictable connection between morality and money? *Is* there a connection, in your opinion? *Should* there be one?
4. When the producers of the miniseries decided to cast a black actress as Mia, it meant that the Ryans would need to be black also. Do you think this matters, or not?

Read the article, “How *Little Fires Everywhere* Expanded the Novel’s Meditations on Motherhood” by Maria Elena Fernandez (*Vulture*, March 19, 2020), and jot down some notes on how the story challenges our ideas about race.

CHAPTER 13

picture yourself owning



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1. “In the end, she told herself it was the math that decided her.” Was it? Should it have?
2. In what ways are the conversations with Warren and with her parents critical turning points in Mia’s life?
3. We tend to see Mia as a strong independent character, making her way in the world on her own, but in fact, quite a lot of people have helped her. Make a list of these people and reconsider your assessment of Mia. Is *anyone* really independent? What are the implications of your answer?
4. What is the reader expected to take away from Lexie’s predicament?
5. Could Mia, as the responsible adult, handled this matter differently? Should she have?
6. What’s wrong with Pearl’s rationalization that “Omission...was not the same as lying.” Are there ever good reasons to hide things from one’s parents?
7. Chapter 15 gives rise to some intense thinking about choices and consequences. What are your thoughts on this?

CHAPTERS 14-15



1. Can moral or ethical conflicts effectively be resolved by law? (Note that this dilemma is emphasized by the use of parenthetical counterclaims.)
2. So: What does make someone a mother?
3. What's your position on *The Five Chinese Brothers*?
4. Can you find where the omniscient narrator breaks into the story on p. 264? What's this about?
5. What's your opinion on Mrs. McCullough's final statement on the witness stand?
6. Analyze the threads in the family discussion after the hearing; identify the biases—the shifting opinions of the characters based on their personal experiences.
7. Is there a subtle change in Mrs. Richardson at the close of Chapter 16? If so, where does it come from?
8. In what ways do the teenagers seem to be creating their own realities in Chapter 17?
9. Do you think the Judge may be overcompensating for his own biases?
10. What is revealed here about the dangers of making judgments about others?
11. Mrs. Richardson justifies her actions with the phrase, “once she gets her life together” in reference to Bebe. Comments, anyone?



CHAPTERS 16-17

1. What do you make of this business of “permission” in the context of Mia’s relationship with Bebe?
2. Discuss the confrontation between Elena and Mia—what prevents these two from reconciling these angry emotions? Is reconciliation even possible? Was it *ever* possible?
3. Why does Pearl think “the Richardsons would never let her go”?
4. Does Moody’s character lose some of our respect in Chapter 19?
5. Who is most responsible for the disaster? Rank the characters, just for fun—there are, of course, no right answers!
6. Unpack the artwork. Do Trip and Moody understand the messages in the art?
7. Who paid for Bebe’s ticket?
8. What is the epiphany at the end? Is there a central irony in the story? Are the characters in this novel terrible people, or are they caricatures of what we might consider normal people?
9. Has reading this book changed your views on anything?

Celeste bought these dolls for her 8 year-old son, who arranged them in these poses; she posted this pic on Twitter.

CHAPTERS 18-20

