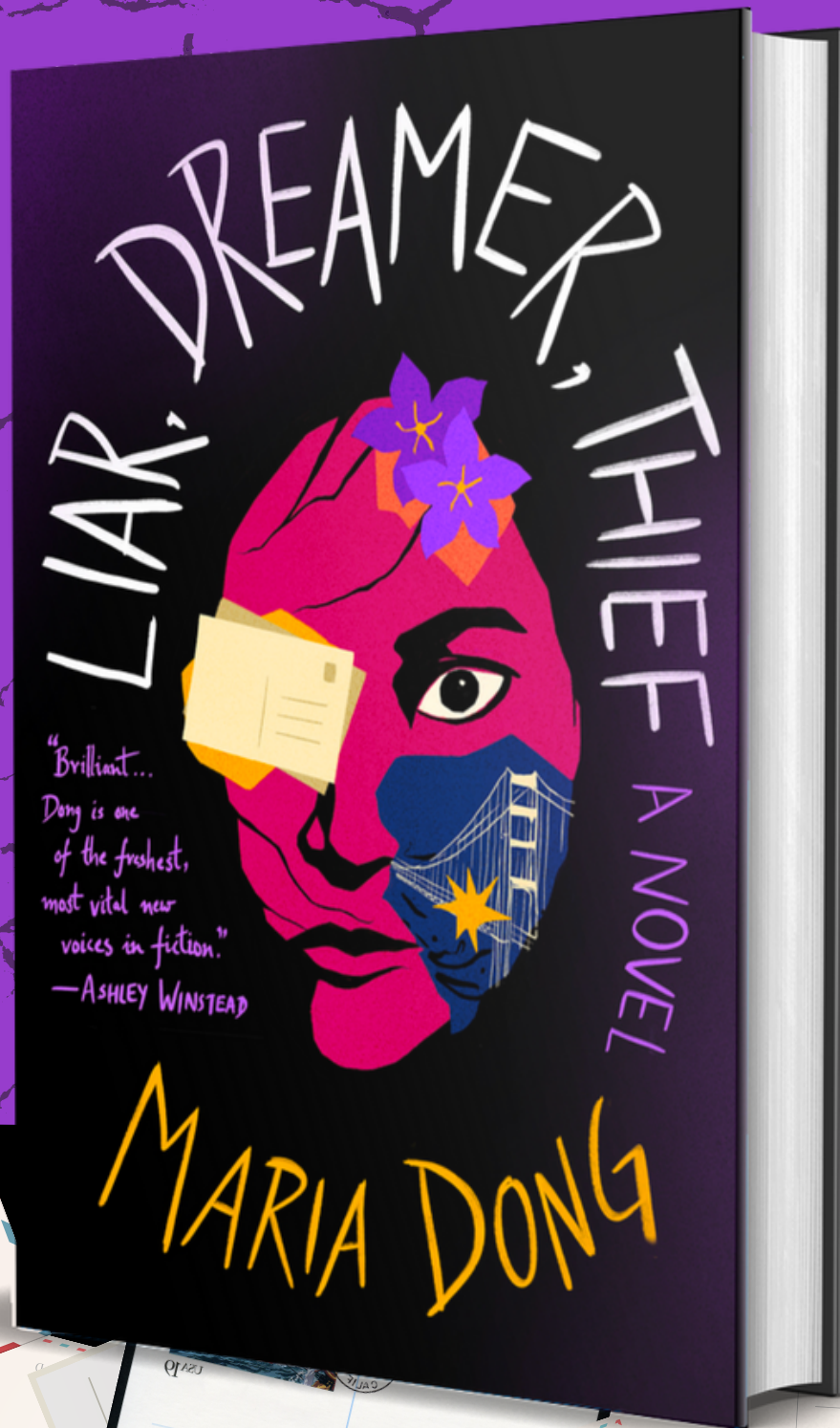


BOOK CLUB KIT





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In interviews, the author of *Liar, Dreamer, Thief* has stated that she sometimes finds it difficult to slot her work neatly into one genre. Do you agree with this assessment? What genre(s) would you place this book into and why?
2. The novel opens with Katrina remembering the exact moment she found her copy of *Mi-Hee and the Mirror-Man* at a Scholastic Book Fair. Why do you think it's important for readers of all ages to see themselves represented in fiction? Did you also have a special book as a child?
3. Scenes from *Mi-Hee and the Mirror-Man* are interspersed throughout the narrative. How did Mi-Hee's story foreshadow and reflect Katrina's journey? Which excerpt from *Mi-Hee and the Mirror-Man* made the greatest impression on you? Why?
4. Mirrors play a heavily symbolic role in *Liar, Dreamer, Thief*. Literally and figuratively, how did the author play with the concepts of reflection and doubles in the novel?
5. Katrina's kitchen-door world is filled with analogs—anthropomorphic representations of the people in her life, like Leoni (a unicorn) and Yocelyn (a rat). Why do you think the author choose the analogs she did for each character?
6. Discuss the level of detail the author used to bring sensory details to life in the novel—the taste of sugar, the smell of smoke, the fantastical visuals from the kitchen-door world. Did one particular scene stand out to you? Which was your favorite?

7. Katrina has a number of coping mechanisms: counting, reciting, drawing her sigil, moving in symmetrical patterns with the right number of repetitions. Based on your reading, why do you think these rituals worked for her? Have you ever engaged in rituals to attract good luck—or ward off bad luck?
8. After reuniting with her parents, Katrina says the following: “My mother says Koreans have a word for a special kind of grief—“han.” Han is more than sadness: it’s the aching loss of generations; the righteous, enduring anger of the once-occupied.” Do you believe that there are emotions we don’t have words for in English—or that emotions can differ based on language and culture? Do you think it’s possible to transmit a feeling across generations?
9. How did the kitchen-door world help Katrina puzzle out the world around her? When you were reading, did you feel that Katrina was strongest when she trusted or shied away from her instincts (including the kitchen-door world and its logic)? Why?
10. In *Liar, Dreamer, Thief*, how did the author use the fantastical and symbolic to comment on larger themes of immigration, family, class, and mental health?
11. Katrina often feels like she exists in two worlds, but never fits perfectly into either. Have you ever felt separated from the world and the people around you? How did you work through those feelings?
12. Discuss the concept of control in the novel—how characters value it, exert it, and lose it, in both themselves and others.

FOLLOW THE AUTHOR!



@Maria_Dong_Writes



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MORE RESOURCES FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB

POSTCARD

"Clarinet Concerto in A Major"

- Mozart

"The man of the time" - Shim Soo

Bong

"Swan Lake" - HAUSER

"Reverie, L. 68: Reverie" - Debussy

"The Firebird Suite" - Igor

Stravinsky

"Money" - Pink Floyd

AND MORE



Katrina's Playlist

Music from the book

[Click to Listen on Spotify](#)

POSTCARD

"Heart Skipped A Beat" - The xx

"Nobody" - Wonder Girls

"Boogie Man" - Hong Jin Young

"She Is" - Claziquai

"땃다!! 그녀!!" - Witches

"(Don't Fear) The Reaper" - Blue

Oyster Cult

AND MORE



Reader's Playlist

Music for your book club

[Click to Listen on Spotify](#)

A CONVERSATION WITH MARIA DONG

What inspired you to write *Liar, Dreamer, Thief*?

I got COVID in late March 2020 while working in a hospital. Given that I didn't have the energy to stand for a whole shower, I should've been miserable, but without that job, my mental health improved so much that my whole personality changed. It was shocking—you get to a certain age, and you think you know who you are.

And just as I was suddenly questioning everything I knew to be true about myself, I had a phone call with my agent, and she wanted to know if I thought I could write something more grounded in reality than the science fiction book we were shopping around.

So that's where this book started—with this very practical challenge of *Can I write a book that isn't a fantasy book?* (As you can tell, I only partially succeeded.) When I asked myself, *Well, what would it be about?*, I suddenly saw a woman watching a man jump off a bridge.



Credit: Brea Oakes Photography

What, in your opinion, are the most important elements of good writing?

I don't believe there is such a thing as "good" writing—any work of fiction is a series of trade-offs. For example, a clear, readable style means your prose likely won't be as poetic; tight, genre-perfect plotting means your book's twists and turns may be less likely to take your reader by surprise. Ultimately, it's the writer's job to have a clear vision of the kind of book they want to create and make the right choices to support that vision.

Tonally, the novel incorporates humor into tragedy and tragedy into comedy. Did these shifts occur organically, or were they conscious decisions you made while writing?

For about 70 percent of the first draft, the book had no humor in it. I was trying so hard to write what I assumed was a dark, twisty story that I wasn't doing a great job of listening to the character—and then I wrote the scene where Katrina's in the dumpster, and everything is just disgusting, and I realized for the first time that although the book is dark in places, it was also supposed to be light and funny.

What kind of research did you do for *Liar, Dreamer, Thief*, and how long did the process take? What were your most surprising discoveries?

A lot of the research was just life experience. I've traditionally been really, really bad at sticking with one career (hello, ADHD). Thanks to my previous work history, I already knew about things like key cutting, programming, and using onion-based browsers, and back-end insurance rebilling (and I actually was an occupational therapist in a previous life!).

Although I knew I really wanted some of Katrina’s coping mechanisms to be based on numerical repetitions and shapes, I did have to do some research to find the ones I thought were the right fit—so things like magical geometry, polygons and their stellations, et cetera. I also did a lot of research on codes and hidden messages, like the Voynich manuscript and modern steganographic techniques.

There are a number of powerful themes explored in *Liar, Dreamer, Thief*, such as the stigma of mental health in Asian-American communities. Why was it important to you to explore these issues in fiction, and what are you hoping readers will take away from Katrina’s experiences?

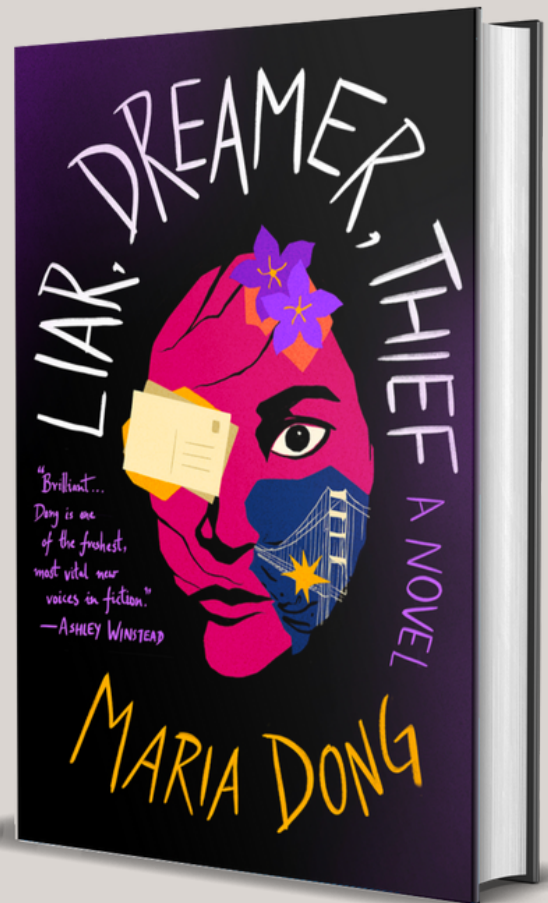
There are a lot of discussions in the literary community right now about representation. If we’re strictly talking about numbers and percentages, according to most recent industry surveys, Asian Americans, and particularly Far East Asians, aren’t underrepresented in the literary space. At the same time, there’s this pressure for us to only produce specific kinds of (often orientalist) content. (Cathy Park Hong talks about this in her book, *Minor Feelings*, which I recommend everybody read.)

I think that one of my goals as a writer is just to write books where Korean people—and that includes diaspora people and mixed-race people—do things we’re not normally depicted as doing, like being average millennials, or exploring veganism, or being incidentally queer. I’m happy I was able to write a book with a Korean American protagonist who has two parents who are both alive, and that despite their struggles, ultimately have a strong relationship with no abuse or “tiger-mom” dynamics. (I’m not saying that these topics aren’t valid or necessary! I just wanted to do something different.)

ARE YOU
A LIAR, A DREAMER,
OR A THIEF?



Find out with our TikTok filter!



THE WATCHLIST

Movies and TV shows to watch filled with the same themes from *LIAR, DREAMER, THIEF*

1. ***When the Camellia Blooms***: humorous, class-conscious family saga with a sinister side
2. ***Do Revenge***: messy young adults, darkly comedic, obsession, justice
3. ***The Woman in the House Across the Street from the Girl in the Window***: self-referential psychological suspense, hallucinations, unexpected humor, isolation
4. ***Everything Everywhere All at Once***: genre-bending, Asian-American, fantasy in plain sight, workplace commentary, family saga, absurdism
5. ***Heathers***: mental health, dark comedy, alienation, frenemies, spiraling out of control
6. ***You (Netflix)***: obsession, protagonists without self-awareness, black humor
7. ***Santa Clarita Diet (Netflix)***: humor, secrets, family dynamics, fantasy twist
8. ***Donnie Darko***: hallucinations, surrealism, psychological, mysteries that blur the lines between art, reality, and the subconscious
9. ***Killing Eve***: queer, multicultural, obsession, imagination
10. ***Black Swan***: classical music, fairytale vibes, mental illness, stalking, hallucinations, control, surreal
11. ***Fight Club***: mental illness, anti-capitalist, absurd, frenemies
12. ***The Invisible Man***: unseen enemies, paranoia, weird
13. ***Severance***: capitalism and alienation in the workplace, everything's unreliable
14. ***Perfect Blue***: stalking, hidden messages, unclear realities, mental illness
15. ***Search Party***: comedic thriller, unlikely amateur sleuths, someone's watching
16. ***Russian Doll***: messy heroines with chaotic coping skills, depression, laughter meets thrills and tears, layers on top of layers