

A River of Stars

A NOVEL

Vanessa
Hua

BOOK CLUB KIT

"An utterly absorbing novel about the ruthless love of parenthood and the universal truth that sometimes family runs deeper than blood alone."

—Celeste Ng,

author of *Little Fires Everywhere*

"In *A River of Stars*, Vanessa Hua illuminates the lives of her characters with energy, verve, and heart.

Hua tracks the minutest emotional terrain of these characters while simultaneously integrating the cultural and economic forces that shape their worlds.

This book holds your attention until the very last page."

—Emma Cline,

author of *The Girls*

VanessaHua.com



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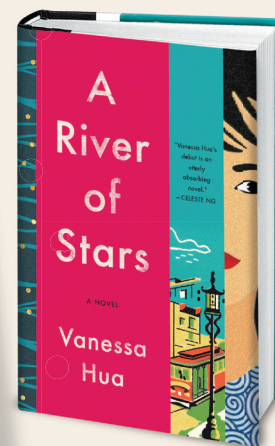
A RIVER OF STARS • A NOTE FROM VANESSA HUA

Dear Readers,

I'm thrilled that you will be discussing my debut novel, *A River of Stars* with your book club. I began writing it while pregnant with my twin sons. I was inspired after hearing about secret maternity centers that housed pregnant women from China. The mothers-to-be intended to give birth here, granting their babies U.S. citizenship. Who were these women, and what was it like to be so far from home and their families during the most vulnerable time in their life? What would a child with U.S. citizenship mean to them?

I hope that you find this event kit useful and that you have a great discussion.

Best,
Vanessa Hua



A RIVER OF STARS • DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Scarlett Chen is a survivor. What aspects of her personality enable her to survive? Consider the immigrants in your family history, or others whom you might know—what have they endured to live in a new land?
2. Motherhood is a major theme of the novel. How does Scarlett's relationship change with her mother after she becomes one herself? How does Scarlett navigate motherhood similarly and differently than much younger Daisy?
3. Did you find the character of Scarlett's mother sympathetic? Why or why not?
4. What is the dynamic between Scarlett and Daisy? What is special about women's friendships, and how women can sustain and challenge each another?
5. Chinese tradition calls for women to confine themselves for a month after giving birth and to eat nourishing stews. Contrast this practice with those in the West, which get women back on their feet more quickly. What are the drawbacks and benefits of both?
6. If Scarlett had remained in China to give birth, what kind of life could she have made for herself and her child? What are the opportunities and difficulties she faces by coming to America?
7. Many of the themes of the novel relate to immigration and identity. How are those themes relevant to current events?
8. Daisy is American-born and Taiwan-bred. With a foot in two worlds, how does she find home and belonging?
9. San Francisco's Chinatown—the oldest in the United States—is a haven and a hideout for Daisy and Scarlett. What did you find most unexpected about this enclave, and what interested you most?
10. Scarlett and Boss Yeung have a fiery, complex relationship. What are they seeking in each other and how does their relationship evolve?
11. Food is culture, preserving and passing down traditions from one generation to the next, and carried from one country to another. What role does food play in the novel, and, in particular, for Scarlett?
12. Did the novel contribute to your understanding of modern Chinese history or culture? What aspects surprised you in Vanessa Hua's depiction of China and Chinatowns?
13. Hua writes about the myth of the cow-herder and the fairy weaver, two lovers separated by a river of stars and reunited once a year. How do you interpret the meaning of this myth? What do you think the river of stars represents when viewed through the lens of global migration?

A RIVER OF STARS • **FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT**Recipe: **Slow Cooker Ginger Chicken Congee**

Serves: 6-8

Ingredients:• **Congee:**

- 8 cups water
- 3 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs (about 1 1/2 pounds total)
- 1 cup long-grain white rice, preferably jasmine
- 4 (1/4-inch-thick) slices fresh ginger, smashed
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more as needed

• **Optional toppings:**

- Roasted peanuts
- Thinly sliced scallions
- Minced fresh ginger
- Fresh cilantro leaves
- Tamari or soy sauce

Instructions:

1. Place all the ingredients for the congee in a 5-quart or larger slow cooker.
2. Cover and cook until very creamy and the rice is completely broken down, 8 to 10 hours on the LOW setting or 5 hours on the HIGH setting.
3. Transfer the chicken and ginger to a plate.

4. Stir the congee with a wooden spoon, making sure to scrape against the bottom and sides of the slow cooker to incorporate congee that's sticking there.
5. Shred the chicken, then stir the meat back into the slow cooker, discarding the bones, skin, cartilage, and ginger.
6. If you would like a thinner congee, add additional water 1/4 cup at a time until you reach the desired consistency.
7. Taste and season with more salt as needed.
8. Serve hot with the toppings.

Credit: TheKitchn.com



A RIVER OF STARS • FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT

Recipe: Shrimp with Spicy Garlic Sauce

Serves: 3

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 pounds uncooked large shrimp
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons chili sauce
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed or finely chopped
- 1 pinch freshly-ground black pepper
- 1 scallion, thinly sliced

Instructions:

1. Peel the shrimp, leaving the tail segments intact.
2. Devein the shrimp if you choose.
3. In a small bowl, mix together the soy sauce, chili sauce, sesame oil, rice wine, and sugar and set aside. In a wok or large pan, heat the olive oil over medium-high heat.

4. Stir-fry the garlic until fragrant, about 30 seconds.
5. Add the shrimp and cook until both sides are pink, about 2 minutes on each side.
6. Add the sauce mixture and stir so the shrimp is fully coated.
7. Season with black pepper.
8. Remove from the heat and garnish with chopped scallions.
9. Serve with rice or vegetables.

Credit: Epicurious.com



A RIVER OF STARS • **FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT**

Recipe: **Shortbread Cookies**

Makes: 8 cookies

Ingredients:

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

Instructions:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.
2. Whip butter with an electric mixer until fluffy.
3. Stir in the confectioners' sugar, cornstarch, and flour.
4. Beat on low for one minute, then on high for 3 to 4 minutes.
5. Drop cookies by spoonfuls 2 inches apart on an ungreased cookie sheet.
6. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes in the preheated oven.
7. Watch that the edges don't brown too much.
8. Cool on wire racks.

Credit: Epicurious.com



A RIVER OF STARS • FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT

Recipe: **Churros**

Serves: 4

Ingredients:

- 1 cup water
- 2½ tablespoons white sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 quarts oil for frying
- ½ cup white sugar, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Instructions:

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine water, 2½ tablespoons sugar, salt, and 2 tablespoons vegetable oil.
2. Bring to a boil and remove from heat.
3. Stir in flour until mixture forms a ball.
4. Heat oil for frying in deep-fryer or deep skillet to 375 degrees.
5. Pipe strips of dough into hot oil using a pastry bag.
6. Fry until golden; drain on paper towels.
7. Combine ½ cup sugar and cinnamon.
8. Roll drained churros in cinnamon and sugar mixture.

Credit: AllRecipes.com



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A RIVER OF STARS • **FOOD IDEAS FOR YOUR BOOK CLUB EVENT**

Recipe: **Lychee Martini**

Serves: 2

Ingredients:

- Ice cubes
- 6 ounces vodka
- 4 ounces lychee juice
- Splash vermouth
- 2 lychees, for garnish

Instructions:

1. In a cocktail shaker filled with ice add vodka, lychee juice, and vermouth.
2. Shake until chilled.
3. Pour into 2 martini glasses.
4. Garnish with lychees.

Credit: FoodNetwork.com



A RIVER OF STARS • **FACTS**

Did you know...

- In the month after delivery, traditional Chinese women confine themselves at home, in a process known as *zuo yuezi*.
- During this process, custom prohibits visitors, baths, going outside, using fans or air conditioners, eating raw foods, reading, or crying, and imposes a diet of special dishes, such as stews to heal the body and to boost milk supply.
- Asian Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. Of the population of 18 million, nearly a quarter are of Chinese descent.
- The first major wave of Chinese immigrants arrived during the California Gold Rush, in the mid-19th century.
- A second wave began in the 1970s and continues to the present.
- Established in 1848, San Francisco's Chinatown is the oldest in North America.
- After the 1906 earthquake and fire, city leaders wanted to move Chinatown to the outskirts in the southeast, but merchants devised a plan to make the neighborhood a tourist spot: They hired architects to design fanciful interpretations of pagodas, adding curved eaves and colorful tiled roofs to buildings, which still attract visitors today.
- There are more Chinese restaurants in the United States than McDonald's, Burger Kings, Wendy's, Domino's, and Pizza Huts combined.
- There are more than 4,000 food trucks in the United States, with California in the lead, accounting for 13 percent of all such businesses.
- The *qipao*, also known as *cheongsam*, is a one-piece Chinese dress that originated in 17th-century China. The wide and baggy dress evolved into a form-fitting one with a high slit on one or both sides, starting in Shanghai in the 1920s.
- Dim sum, which originated in Guangdong province on the southern coast of China, includes delicacies such as *har gow* (shrimp dumplings) and *char siu bao* (barbecue pork buns.) Served in steamer baskets from morning until early afternoon, its name translates to "touch of the heart."