

## Further Reading

### **Big Little Lies**

**Liane Moriarty (2014)**

#### **MORIARTY**

A horrible act of violence occurs at a school trivia night fundraiser for parents. What happened and who is guilty? The novel begins six months before that fateful evening and lets readers in on the lives of single mother Jane, twice-married Madeline, and the silently victimized Celeste

### **Commonwealth**

**Ann Patchett (2016)**

#### **PATCHETT**

The Cousins and the Keatings are two California families forever intertwined and permanently shattered by infidelity. Bert Cousins leaves his wife for Beverly Keating, leaving her to raise four children on her own. Beverly, with two children of her own, leaves her husband for Bert. The six children involved are forced to forge a childhood bond based on the combined disappointment in their parents.

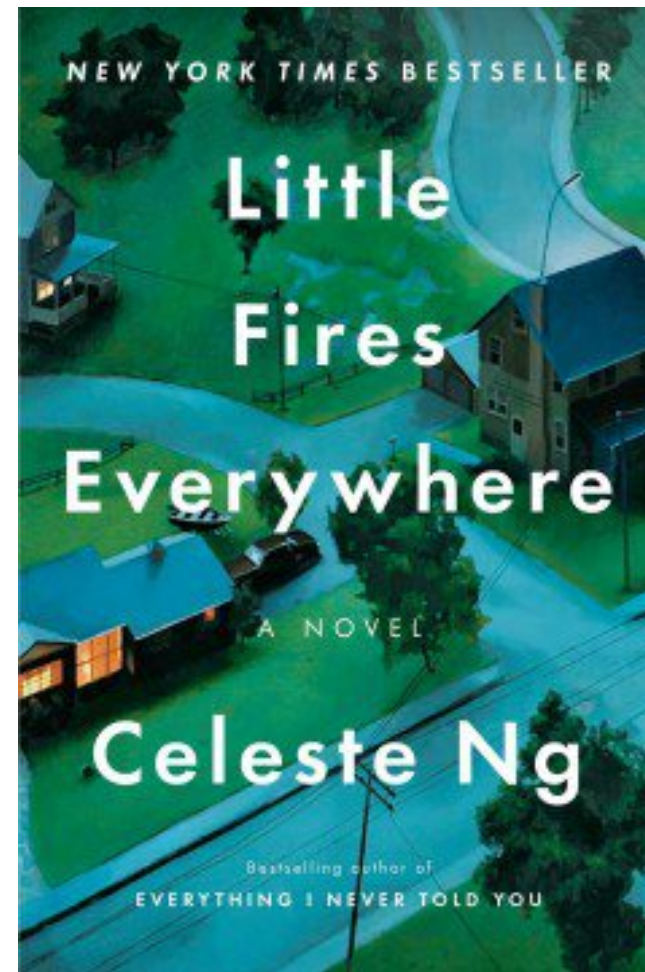
### **A Spool of Blue Thread**

**Anne Tyler (2015)**

#### **TYLER**

The Whitshanks are a family that radiates togetherness. But they are also like all families, in that the stories they tell themselves reveal only part of the picture. Abby and Red and their four grown children have accumulated not only tender moments, laughter, and celebrations, but also jealousies, disappointments, and carefully guarded secrets.

## Book Discussion Guide



## About the Book

Ugliness seethes under a placid suburban surface in this multilayered novel, in which two families grow too close for comfort. Itinerant artist Mia and her teenage daughter Pearl rent a home in Ohio from the Richardsons, who have four kids around Pearl's age. Three of the four become Pearl's constant companions; the fourth becomes Mia's. A custody suit elsewhere in the community threatens everything, creating "little fires everywhere."

## Discussion Questions

1. Shaker Heights is almost another character in the novel. Do you believe that "the best communities are planned"? Why or why not?
2. *Little Fires Everywhere* is set in the late 1990s, and we see the experiences of marginalized characters in the novel, as well as their interactions with those in the larger community. In what ways are attitudes toward race and class the same today? In what ways are they different?
3. There are many different kinds of mother-daughter relationships in the novel. Which ones did you find most compelling? Do mothers have a unique ability to spark fires in us, for good and ill?
4. Which of the Richardson children is most changed by the events of the novel? How do you think this time ultimately changes Lexie's life? Trip's? Moody's?
5. The debate over the fate of May Ling/Mirabelle is multilayered and heartbreaking. Who do you think should raise her?
6. How is motherhood defined throughout the book? How do choice, opportunity, and circumstances impact different characters' approach to motherhood?
7. Mia's journey to becoming an artist is almost a beautiful novella of its own. Mia's art clearly has the power to change lives. What piece of art has shaped your life in an important way?
8. Pearl has led a singular life before arriving in Shaker, but once she meets the Richardsons, she has the chance to become a "normal" teenager. Is that a good thing?
9. What ultimately bothers Elena most about Mia?
10. The novel begins with a great conflagration, but its conclusion is even more devastating. What do you think happens to Elena after the novel ends? To Mia and Pearl? To Izzy? Do you think Izzy ever returns to Shaker and her family? Why or why not?
11. Celeste Ng is noted for her ability to shift between the perspective of different characters in her work. How does that choice shape the reader's experience of the novel?
12. Izzy chooses "This Be the Verse" to sum up her life. Is the poem accurate, in the context of Izzy's experience?
13. What does the title mean to you? What about the book's dedication?

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