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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **Crazy Rich Asians** by Kevin Kwan

#### Summary

*Crazy Rich Asians* is the outrageously funny debut novel about three super-rich, pedigreed Chinese families and the gossip, backbiting, and scheming that occurs when the heir to one of the most massive fortunes in Asia brings home his ABC (American-born Chinese) girlfriend to the wedding of the season.

When Rachel Chu agrees to spend the summer in Singapore with her boyfriend, Nicholas Young, she envisions a humble family home, long drives to explore the island, and quality time with the man she might one day marry. What she doesn't know is that Nick's family home happens to look like a palace, that she'll ride in more private planes than cars, and that with one of Asia's most eligible bachelors on her arm, Rachel might as well have a target on her back. Initiated into a world of dynastic splendor beyond imagination, Rachel meets Astrid, the It Girl of Singapore society; Eddie, whose family practically lives in the pages of the Hong Kong socialite magazines; and Eleanor, Nick's formidable mother, a woman who has very strong feelings about who her son should—and should not—marry.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Compare how Nick's mother and Rachel's mother react to hearing about their trip to Singapore. What do their reactions reveal about each of them as mothers? What qualities, if any, do they share?
2. Does Nick's description—“It's like any big family. I have loudmouthed uncles, eccentric aunts, obnoxious cousins, the whole nine yards”—match the way most of us view our own families? Why doesn't he tell Rachel more about the background and status of his family before their trip?
3. What does Rachel's view of Asian men reveal about the complications of growing up Asian in America? How does Kwan use humor to make a serious point here and in other parts of the novel?
4. Discuss the role of gossip in the novel. Why do misunderstandings and misinformation (intentional or not) propel the plot and help define the characters?
5. What sort of future do you imagine for Nick and Rachel? Is it possible for Rachel to fit into a world “so different from anything [she's] used to”? Does Nick fully understand the reasons for her doubts and unhappiness? What supports your point of view?

6. Why does the author devote different sections of the novel to specific characters? What effect does this have on your impressions of and sympathies for the problems and prejudices that motivate each of them?
7. What do the marriages of Eleanor and Philip, Astrid and Michael, and Eddie and Fiona show about what makes a marriage work and what can undermine even the best-intentioned husbands and wives?
8. In what ways are the characters in *Crazy Rich Asians* different from you and the people you know? Do they reflect the values of the particular communities Kwan explores or do they represent the ways of rich people everywhere?
9. The novel makes a clear distinction between old money and new, as well as between Mainland and Overseas Chinese. What differences do you see between these groups and the way they deal with their wealth? How does this shape their perceptions of themselves and one another?
10. Which scenes and settings in the novel best capture the extremes of conspicuous wealth and consumption? What do the many references to well-known luxury brands and exotic, expensive settings contribute to your sense of the time, place, and worldview of the characters?
11. Nick's family has enjoyed wealth and privilege over several generations. Discuss the impact of their position on each generation, from the imperious Eleanor to the status-consuming Eddie to Astrid, the It girl of Asian society, to Nick.
12. What role does the legacy of European imperialism play in the older generation's tastes and style? How is the younger generation affected by their travels abroad and exposure to modern-day Western society? What insights does Rachel and Nick's conversation with Su Yi give into the melding and clashing of European and Chinese cultures over the course of time?
13. In what ways do the footnotes help the author to fill out the narrative or comment on the context and content of his story?
14. Behind its satirical tone and intent, what does the novel suggest about the ethical and emotional implications of the behavior that the characters indulge in?
15. Were you surprised by manifestations of wealth depicted in the book? Peik Lin's father says, "[T]his so-called 'prosperity' is going to be the downfall of Asia. Each new generation becomes lazier than the next.... Nothing lasts forever, and when this boom ends, these youngsters won't know what hit them". To what extent are his insights accurate, not only in regard to the situation in Asia today but also to economic patterns across history?

Summary and Discussion Questions from the publisher.